

GLOBALIZATION AND LEARNING

Preamble:

As we have entered the 21st century, we should all be concerned about the effects of the ongoing global technological and politico-economic developments on us, on educational institutions, and on the future of our students. Our College cannot stand isolated from these global trends which are increasingly permeating every aspect of our lives. The following, then, are intended as a modest contribution to the required adaptation of our curricula and teaching objectives to the new reality of a strengthening globalization process.

Overview:

In this essay I suggest the development of an integrated and collaborative project under the title “Comparing Nations and Understanding Diversity in the Emerging Global Society.” This initiative is intended (a) to make students in our community college aware of the ongoing strong trends toward economic, political, communicative, and cultural globalization, and (b) to lead to the creation of an interdisciplinary program bringing together business, social science, geography, and humanities faculty who have an international orientation. These goals could be achieved by the initial development of (1) a unit/project in “Comparative Social Development” [Comparing Nations] and (2) a project in “International Business Communication” [Cultural Differences in Business Practices]. Even if already operational, they could be further enhanced with the addition of several “case-based” components and appropriate project resources. The first is in need of initial development. The current project spells out the reasons for the urgent development and integration of programs and/or projects related to the global trends and explores the first steps for implementing the proposed unit.

Present Curricular Offerings:

Presently, we do see efforts on becoming familiar with International Communication. The assignments require research on projects, and presentations in class. About a couple of years ago, one of the core assignments I came along was to select two countries, to imagine traveling there for business, and to try learning as much as required about these countries so that the business trip could become successful. Students opted to focus on Egypt and India. There were about 10-12 students in the class. They split into two groups, each focusing on one country. They had to complete a geographic, demographic, and politico-economic profile of the country and then proceed to detailing a specific business plan for their trip. They were told to use flexibly both print and non-print sources, maps, brochures, charts, statistics, embassy-provided information, visuals and videos, information derived from interviews, expert advice, and so on. Librarians directed them to the materials prepared for their purposes and educated them on the prolific and profitable use of the Internet for research.

Each student in the two groups had to take a special responsibility on a topic or facet of the project. They were to meet many times for coordinating their efforts. At the end, they were to give a rich, multimedia presentation to the whole class about the execution of their business plan in that foreign land and the problems [especially cultural communication problems] they had to address and resolve while in that country. All these activities were done with considerable excitement. Furthermore, at the conclusion of their presentations, the students came together to celebrate, prepared ethnic (Indian and Egyptian) foods, shared recipes, and discussed various other ethnic practices. Two packets of information were produced and placed on reserve (at the time) in the library under the teacher's name, for future reference.

Implementation Action Steps:

Up to the present, therefore, we have managed to apply a number of insights – ideas on project-based learning [constructivist theory], collaborative and interdisciplinary teaching, the active role of the students and their multifunctional creativity, the opening of the classroom to the outside world, global communication via the Internet, and the like.

Further implementation steps are currently taken to seek a broadening of focus in the direction of the “integration”. I have noticed that students in social science must be drawn into the enlarged unit as well as students from the Humanities. After all, the globalization process is affecting everyone and in every respect! Issues of “convergence” between nations and peoples have to be raised as well as issues of “divergence” and cultural diversity. That is why a “holistic” approach to the world is required, through which economic realities, business practices, political differences, historical experience, cultural sensibilities, and psychological dispositions will be studied. This is a tall order for which a large “community of learners” is required (teachers and students as co-learners, outside experts, other interacting communities, and so on). There is a need to bring this “community of learners” to partner with county businesses, government offices, and other institutions interested in, and addressing various issues of, international relations. To implement the “second phase” of the project we would have to create a “cluster of related projects” for future reference. There is need for “resources coordination” in this project in order to facilitate access by any member of our “community of learners” to a selective and well-maintained database of Internet “hot links” providing maps, information, hypermedia-recast explanations, data, graphs and pictures, and the like. Moreover, the “core idea coordinators,” could also provide strategic direction and advice regarding the integration of courses in view of the intended goals. There is need for commitment to prepare various multimedia [mostly Internet-based] materials on 10-15 societies across the continental, economic, technological, and developmental Divides and create several more specific projects for an enhanced class on “globalization and its effects.” A plan should be also developed to activate linkages with other community colleges in the United States and abroad.

Expert Support:

During my participation in a course on “Technology and Learning in Today’s Classroom,” and in my desire to become myself a “change agent,” I have consulted a number of further readings to gain deeper knowledge of various learning theories and approaches to active learning. I have noticed the broad relevance of the general “constructivist” approach to learning inaugurated by Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner [See, for example, Bruner’s book *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Harvard University, 1986]. I was also impressed by the views of R. Spiro and his associates [see Spiro, R. J. and J. Jehng (1980)], founders of the so-called “Cognitive Flexibility Theory,” as well as by the views of Roger Schank and his associates at Northwestern University’s Institute for the Learning Sciences. Spiro and his associates [Cognitive flexibility and hypertext: Theory and technology for the non-linear and multidimensional traversal of complex subject matter. In D. Nix & R. Spiro (eds.), *Cognition, Education, and Multimedia*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum] have shown that the learning environment presents multiple perspectives on the content, is complex and ill-defined, and emphasizes the construction of knowledge by the learner. For these reasons, learning activities must provide multiple representations of content, instructional materials should support context-dependent knowledge, and instruction should be case-based and emphasize knowledge construction, not transmission of information. Roger Schank, on his part [see R. Schank & C. Cleary, *Engines for Education*, a “hyper-book” published/produced by the Institute for the Learning Sciences, 1994], rejects the model of the student as “a sponge .. able to soak up whatever material is presented, regardless of whether it is perceived as interesting or useful” and affirms that people “learn by doing, making mistakes, and having experts share experiences to show them what has gone wrong.” This elaboration of the “constructivist theory” is further strengthened by studies on “Situating Learning” espoused by J. Lave and his collaborators [see J. Lave & E. Wenger (1990). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press]. Arguing that social interaction is a critical component of situated learning, Lave shows that learners become involved in a “community of practice” which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors; it is in this process of collaborative social interaction in authentic contexts that learners become more active and engaged. Clearly these views accord perfectly well with the principles and practical demonstrations provided by the leading presenters in our course’s videos.

The other theoretical issue is that of allowing active students to contribute more in the areas of their interests cultivating and demonstrating their particular talents. Inspired by this view, I have read more of the work of Howard Gardner [see his books *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* and *Creating Minds* (both: Basic Books, 1993)]. Gardner has argued that there are seven primary forms of intelligence: linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, intra-personal (insight, intuition), and interpersonal (social, emotional). The implications of his well-supported theory is that individuals should be encouraged to express, use, and cultivate their preferred intelligences in learning; that instructional activities should appeal to different forms of intelligence through multiple representations; and that any assessment tool of intelligence and learning should be able to measure multiple forms of intelligence. These arguments, too, support significantly the general “constructivist” theory and its many applied variants.

I have described above several learning-theoretical views supporting the structure of the proposed Application Project. I now turn to some other theoretical views in support of the Project’s content and significance. I am referring specifically to the increasing importance of global learning and, therefore, also of the globalization process itself. It is not sufficient for a teacher to make intuitive references to “how small the world has become” as a result of the transportation and communications revolution. To paraphrase a well-known saying about the need for information skills, today, we must all become “globalization-savvy,” not merely “globalization-literate.”

Several social theorists since the 1960s have noticed and emphasized the growth of global enterprises and the increasing density of international networks. Already in the late 1960s, Daniel Bell, in his book *The Coming of Postindustrial Society* [Basic Books 1970, 1999] put emphasis on the knowledge basis of the emerging society which, he argued, will be made quickly global because ideas cannot be fully commodified and easily controlled. Peter Drucker, in his *Post-Capitalist Society* [Harperbusiness 1994] stressed similar lines and advised the modern corporations to adapt to the new information and globalization realities or face death. Since those early works, a plethora of writings on globalization has become available, exploring its positive [modernization] aspects [see, for example, Anthony Giddens’s *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press 1991] or its negative [homogenization] aspects [for example, George Ritzer’s *The McDonaldization of Society*, Pine Forge Press 1995]. In these and other

studies, the economic, political, and informational benefits of globalization are analyzed rather approvingly, while environmental deterioration and the loss of the different cultural traditions is often lamented. Awareness of both the benefits as well as the possible losses resulting from the globalization process is of paramount importance for learners in the 21st century. Training young people in the study of global issues is a very important new competency to which the present project hopes to contribute. Learners should know sufficiently the current State of the World and should be able to raise a number of critical comments on whether globalization leads us to a morally proper “merging of horizons” between cultures [as Hans Gadamer described it in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. University of California Press 1977] or to the unilateral imposition of a – sometimes – heartless “capitalist culture” on the rest of the world.

Envisioning Implementation Results:

Part A -- What should be our expectations? The creation of a large and strong “community of learners” involving faculty, students, community organizations, other colleges and schools, international experts, and foreign institutions and groups. We should expect significant learning progress in the domains of geography, economics and business, international politics, global environmental and earth/atmospheric studies, information technologies, international communications, and the globalization of education. We should also expect a number of specific multimedia projects, with web presence of their own. We should finally expect the active engagement of students, significant use of Internet resources, and student networking with experts and other learners around the globe. The result will be students better equipped and ready to function in the emerging information society, economy, and culture, students trained in case-based problem-solving, project management, and the utilization of higher-order critical skills and models of analysis.

Part B -- How would the results of this project be measured and appraised? The group of faculty involved will collect a variety of assessment tools to monitor and measure the results of the project in terms of the growth of students’ competencies. A project diary/portfolio will record overall weekly progress. For each class a more focused project diary will register the specific project’s progress as well as each student’s particular contributions. Students will be asked to create portfolios of their work related to

the project, and the college could maintain an “electronic portfolio” on their behalf (samples of writing, copies of relevant news stories downloaded daily from the Internet, notes from research, graphical designs or pictures, audio or video productions, or other types of contributions). Through these records students must exhibit the mastery of global geography, basic ecological forms and their implications, developmental conditions and organizational structures of societies, and various cultural beliefs and practices. They should also be savvy about the multiple representations of information constructed/reported via their project (i.e., have detailed knowledge of what the project included and of the techniques creating its various textual, visual, and sound representations). Mastery of a significant vocabulary of concepts and variables, of the ability to provide “comparisons” about the relative condition of nations, of awareness of the critical issues involved, and of the latest scientific and technological advances that affect global developments and relations, will be indications of “change” : What percent of students developed these competencies? How much better are they after the learning experience as compared to their previous state? What objective evidence has accumulated in their portfolios and the other products (such as web pages or exhibits) of their collective project? These will give us a measure of how successful the implemented project has been.

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