Chasing Theme Number Nine: Five Practical Strategies for Making Global Connections

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This article explores practical avenues for making global connections within the social studies classroom. Drawing from my classroom experiences and utilizing the basic principles of global education outlined by Toni Fuss Kirkwood-Tucker (2009) as a conceptual frame, I attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Such an endeavor aims to provide social studies teachers with five practical strategies for making global connections that can be readily employed in their middle and secondary social studies classrooms. These strategies discussed here include structured academic controversy, globalizing physical place, reading visual fine arts, incorporating the natural world, and sampling.

**Keywords:** global education, global connections, structured academic controversy, globalizing physical place, reading visual fine arts, incorporating the natural world, sampling

In 1994, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) outlined 10 standards for social studies educators focused on specific themes. The 10 themes, which are still employed today, serve as the basis for accrediting social studies programs within colleges and schools of education (NCATE, 2014). They further aid social studies educators and their students in organizing strands of information and knowledge embedded within social studies programs across the Kindergarten-12 experience of students. Theme Number Nine, Global Connections, suggests social studies programs should “include learning experiences [for students] that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence” (NCSS, 2010, p. 22). Making these connections relevant to content, however, is a task teachers commonly struggle to make with their students (Cogan & Grossman, 2009; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010; Zong, 2009). Drawing from my experiences, both, as a former middle school teacher and as a current university teacher supervisor, I aim to address this instructional challenge by providing teachers with five practical suggestions that are couched in Kirkwood-Tucker’s (2009) basic principles of global education. This article, thus, attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice and in doing aid social studies teachers in making global connections in their middle and secondary social studies classrooms.

**Incorporating the Global**

The need for global connections in the classroom is not a new phenomenon. Long before NCSS formally included global connections as a priority embedded within its standards for social studies teachers and students, an international or global approach to teaching and learning resonated with many practitioners (Abdullahi, 2010; Gaudelli, 2003; Zong et al., 2008). While the residue of such an approach can be traced to coteries of educators inspired by a Wilsonian disposition (see Tye, 2009), most scholars recognize the late 1960s and 1970s as the contextual genesis of global education in American schools (Gaudelli, 2003; Merryfield, 1997, 2001;
Tucker, 1996). From this era, Robert Hanvey’s (1976) *An Attainable Global Perspective*, leveraged a succinct framework of five interdisciplinary dimensions needed to teach global perspectives and has been suggested as seminal in the promotion of global education (Benitez, 2001; Merryfield et al., 1997; Parker & Camicia, 2007; Tye, 1990, 2009). Dimensions within this seminal piece include:

- **Perspective Consciousness**: Recognition and appreciation that one’s own worldview is not universal.
- **State of the Planet Awareness**: Knowledge of world conditions and their interconnected relationships.
- **Cross-cultural Awareness**: Awareness for diversity concerning ideas and human practices around the world.
- **Knowledge of Global Dynamics**: Understanding key traits and mechanisms of the world system to better conceptualize global change.
- **Awareness of Human Choices**: Awareness of problems that accompany an increase in human choice and the impact of human choice on an expanding global system.

The genealogical influence of Hanvey’s (1976) work is still present within global education (Cruz & Bermudez, 2009; Kirkwood-Tucker, 2009; Knipe, 1986; Myers, 2006) and is evidenced by how scholars choose to articulate characteristics of global education (i.e. global connections). Some examples include: attention to human rights and values (Gaudelli & Fernekes, 2004; Landorf, 2009), global issues and problems (Houser, 2009; Merryfield, 1993; Myers, 2008), global history and content (Misco, 2007; Thornton, 2005; Wilson, 1994), student perspective development (Crocco, 2010; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010), and human interconnectedness (Anderson, 1990; Garlake, 2007). The rationale for equipping instruction with global connections is generally foregrounded in preparing students for citizenship in a global society (Myers, 2006; Noddings, 2005; Nussbaum, 2007). Teachers, however, do not always attain this rationale or goal with students and have expressed a lack of preparation or knowledge base needed to effectively incorporate global connections into their instruction (Cogan & Grossman, 2009; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010; Zong, 2009).

**Five Practical Strategies for Making Global Connections**

My experience working with pre-service teachers, and their host teachers has reinforced the assertion that teachers seem to struggle to make global connections with the content they teach. In addition to the factors impeding global connections mentioned within the literature, additional factors may account for this labor. The most notable, in my experience, may be the breadth vs. depth dilemma in which teachers are forced to negotiate time commitments due to the sheer amount of material to cover. Another may be a belief among teachers that global connections are not inherently embedded in the content they teach compared to other NCSS themes such as Power, Authority, and Governance, or People, Places and Environment.

Having said this, what follows is not a prescription to solve the global connections dilemma alluded to, but rather an attempt to nudge this conversation forward by providing teachers with strategies they can readily use with their students. These strategies are anchored in Kirkwood-Tucker’s (2009) five basic principles for a global education, which, much like Hanvey’s (1976) seminal *An Attainable Global Perspective*, manages to capture the affordances of global education in a succinct manner. In doing so, these works provide an accessible infrastructure or framework from which teachers can begin to conceptualize what global
education looks like and how it can be used in their classrooms. According to Kirkwood-Tucker, the basic principles of global education comprise the:

1. abilities to see one’s world from multiple perspectives, recognizing that others may have views of the world profoundly different from one’s own;
2. to see the causes and effects of globalization as they affect the lives of communities and people, of students and schools;
3. to be able to analyze cross-cultural commonalities and differences and appreciate the contributions made by nations and cultures to civilization;
4. to perceive the interconnectedness of cultural, economic, geographic, political, and technical phenomena with their often-numerous unanticipated consequences; and
5. to perceive the ramifications of decisions made by individuals, groups, and entire nations and how they affect the future of the world (Kirkwood-Tucker, 2009, p. 137-138).

Given the five principles outlined in Kirkwood-Tucker, each of the following strategies represents a viable avenue for addressing each principle. I begin with the Structured Academic Controversy, which addresses the principle of perspective development.

**Structured Academic Controversy to Cultivate Perspective**

Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) encourages students to explore, to develop, and to negotiate alternate points of view framed around dynamic questions from the past. Many variations relative to the structure and the basic routine of this activity exists; essentially, students are posed with a controversial, historical question—the more controversial the question, the better—then, placed in groups of four. Within each group, two members are assigned one side of the debate stemming from the question, while the other two members are assigned the opposing side. Students are given 2 to 3 primary sources embodying their sides of the debate and asked to analyze the documents and substantiate an argument based on their analyses. The two pairs then come together and present their arguments. After presenting their arguments, the pairs switch sides in order to become familiar with the other points of view. They must present the opposing side’s argument based on their analyses. After experiencing both sides of the debate, the four members come together to deliberate and attempt to develop a representative opinion based on the information at hand, after which they present their findings to the class. The quality level of the historical question posed to students drives this strategy. Questions that lend themselves to alternate points of view provide students with the terrain needed to explore positions that may not be inherently their own. Questions such as, “Was the United States decision to invade Iraq after September 11th an appropriate course of action?” or “Should voters be required to show identification when voting today?” can facilitate great discourse amongst students. Charged questions, when explored through SAC, ultimately serve to expand the viewpoints of students by allowing them to see issues from differing perspectives.

A useful resource for teachers interested in more examples and specifics regarding this strategy is the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), whom in one particular example asks students the question, “Was Abraham Lincoln a racist?” Students in this case explore Lincoln’s position on slavery through a series of documents that includes excerpts from his U.S. Senate campaign debates with Stephen Douglas. While reading the source documents, SHEG provides students with scaffolding questions to guide their thoughts and to aid in their developing arguments. Additionally, SHEG provides support in the form of graphic organizers for students to categorize their evidence along with modified versions of the original text. (All materials, including PowerPoint presentations, are downloadable directly from the site and can be printed if
needed.) The Stanford History Education Group offers other SAC lesson plans on topics such as Reconstruction and the New Deal and are a great starting point for teachers new to the strategy.

Before considering SAC in the classroom, teachers should consider a few of the implications and dynamics associated with incorporating controversial topics or issues stemming from the historical questions. Controversial issues “deeply divide a society and generate conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative value systems” (Holden, 2007, p. 57). In light of value judgments involved, teachers need to understand students may not arrive at a consensus or agreement within their pairs or groups, nor may they accept a position as valid regardless of the primary sources presented. With this in mind, the teacher needs to scrupulously recognize and respect the individual needs and backgrounds of their students before implementing SAC and consider what issues may be sensitive for students (see Camicia, 2008). In these cases, Cathie Holden (2007) provides several suggestions. One suggestion includes, distancing procedures, where students explore an analogous situation first and then approach the target issue. To further illustrate this, Holden provides the following example: “If looking at the situation in Palestine, an analogy could be Northern Ireland. The analogy can be examined and students then asked how similar or different one situation is from another” (p. 62).

What Holden (2007) attempts to convey is the importance of sufficient preparation and the recognition and respect of the diverse needs of students before implementing SAC in the classroom. Teachers, as cited in Diana Hess (2002), who “prepare well” (p. 37) have greater success when incorporating controversial issues into their practice. Part of this preparation includes identifying what role the teacher takes as part of class discussions. Four other points to consider are found in Holden (2007) and include:

- The neutral chair – the teacher does not include their opinions and serves only as facilitator
- The balanced approach – teacher maintains a commitment that all aspects of an issue are considered and all sides are given equal weight
- Stated commitment approach – teacher openly conveys her/his opinion to encourage discussion
- Challenging consensus approach – teacher consciously takes the opposing position to those expressed by students

For more information about how to effectively lead discussions that incorporate controversial issues such as Structured Academic Controversy teachers may want to consider the Research Brief (2014), “Discussing Controversial Public Issues in the Classroom,” which efficiently consolidates the Hess (2002) study and offers practical suggestions and resources when considering this strategy with students.

**Globalizing Physical Place to Visualize the Impact of Globalization on Communities**

Today’s communities are lined with global associations unlike any period in our past (Appiah, 2006). With these associations lies the potential for a range of learning opportunities that may enable students to see the impact of globalization on our communities. This activity allows students to choose a specific physical place. This could be the location of a small business, a religious institution, a health organization, etc. By focusing on the physical place (or origin of the global association), students may begin to conceptualize the global reach of place and the notion of interconnectedness. Once students have chosen a place, they then may seek to identify how this location is globally connected. For this activity, teachers can aim for a local community angle and can limit student selections to those within the community. What follows
is a series of steps to help students grasp global associations attached to place and how globalization affects the everyday lives of people and communities across the world.

1. Briefly identify the history of this place.
2. Locate the place on a map.
3. What does this place look like? -- This could be a drawing, a simple description, an image found online, etc., or if the focus is local, students could take a photograph of the physical place; the more students engage with the place, the better.
4. Using a map, draw the global reach of this place, in other words, what other places around the world does this place affect? Draw lines on your map that connects this place to other locations around the world, locations it is affiliated with.
5. Who makes important decisions at this place?
6. Who is affected by these decisions?
7. What would be the impact if this place no longer existed?
8. How does this place represent globalization?

Utilizing this activity, students could explore an international organization and place such as the United Nations headquarters in New York City, or an interfaith organization in the local community that seeks to fight hunger across the globe. The idea, here, is to assist students in conceptualizing how globalization affects our daily lives and communities and what globalization looks like.

Teachers interested in infusing this activity with a map-based technology have a range of online options, however, MapMaker Interactive from National Geographic® is a useful place to start. MapMaker Interactive is a free tool, which enables students to draw the connecting points of association by using the site’s drawing tools option. Students can then link the connecting points of association to an image or an external website and include both a title and description of the association. Once completed, students have an interactive and multi-media presentation they can share with their classmates. Presentations can be emailed, printed, or linked to other online projects. If students do not complete their presentation in one session, they can save their work and revisit it later using the “Download This Map” feature at the bottom of the screen page. MapMaker Interactive is very intuitive and user friendly and does not require a significant investment of time to learn, which is a plus for teachers not wanting to spend an entire class period showing students how to use a new tool. Other possible map-based technologies for this activity, can be found in Todd Kenreich’s (2008) work which features an annotated bibliography of a series of digital maps that will be helpful in selecting just the right tool for students.

**Reading Visual Fine Arts to See Contributions Across Time**

A visually stimulating strategy to help students understand and appreciate contributions from a mosaic of cultures across time toward civilization is Reading Visual Fine Arts. The strategy essentially incorporates works of art into instruction to enhance the learning experience for students. It can be used at the beginning of a lesson or coupled with direct instruction. It may also be incorporated after instruction, depending on how it fits best with students’ and teachers’ comfort levels. The key to this strategy is in the selection of contextually rich works to read with students that will enhance instruction; and by “read” I am suggesting the intentional process of observing art closely (Martin, 2014). In order to provide structure to this activity, Carolyn Halpin-Healy (2014) puts forward seven steps for students to guide them from initial response toward a reflective interpretation of the artwork. What follows is an abridged adaptation of her strategy for students:
1. Observe for one full minute what’s in front of you.
2. Document your initial response. The aim here is to capture the emotional impact.
3. Describe what you see.
4. What about the use of color, line, shape, form, etc. What can you glean from the artist’s use of formal elements?
5. Contextualize the work -- how does the context contribute to the meaning? Who would have been the original audience?
6. Situate the work in time and space. Where does it fit in the larger, global narrative? (Steps 5 and 6 may require work outside the artwork itself.)
7. Reassess the process and your response. Has your response changed since your initial take? What interpretation do you now have regarding its meaning?

This strategy could work nicely, for example, when considering the many contributions of ancient Islamic cultures. Students could navigate works of art representative of these cultures and imagine the global magnitude of Islamic contributions in the fields of science, medicine, mathematics, and literature. Reading these works and contextualizing their significance affords students a glimpse into past worlds through the eyes of the artist.

Teachers interested in this activity and utilizing works of art to enhance their instruction should visit the Metropolitan Art Museum’s online exhibitions for educators. This site features a range of artwork representative of various periods and locations across the human experience. For teachers needing a little more assistance or structure to incorporate artwork, the site also has detailed lesson plans for works of art that correspond with specific time periods and cultures and are aligned with national learning standards and ELA Common Core Standards (see National Governors Association for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

*Vermeer’s Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Global World* (Brooks, 2008) is an additional resource that may be helpful and certainly inspiring for teachers interested in incorporating works of art and reading artwork as part of their instruction.

**Incorporating the Natural World to Demonstrate Interconnectedness**

As teachers of the social studies, we often fail to consider incorporating nature or any medium outside those engineered by the hands of man (Charles, 1985). This may be unfortunate for students because the natural world that surrounds us is a valuable and pedagogically rich resource (see Ryan, 2013). Plants are a perfect example of how the natural world can invite global connections by demonstrating an interconnectedness of civilization that permeates geographic borders, i.e. nature. Utilizing the natural world to enhance instruction provides a tangible and sensory learning experience that allows students to connect to past human narratives; the Columbian Exchange as such, invites the following illustration.

The Age of Exploration, and by extension, the Columbian Exchange, are part and parcel of world and U.S. history curricula. The Columbian Exchange within these disciplines highlights the transaction of language, religion, and other elements of culture to occur through the interactions of indigenous populations of Mesoamerica with settlers and explorers from Western Europe. Students are taught that the Europeans brought with them foodstuffs and domesticated animals such as horses and cattle to the Americas and in return, brought back to Europe smoking tobacco, cacao (chocolate), tomatoes, and other items. Anecdotally speaking, the scope of this exchange is often isolated to these two continents, which may serve to undermine the global magnitude that subsequently transpired. By incorporating the natural world students may gain a better sense of its global impact. Students could trace the travels of a
specific plant; and in doing so, experience the Columbian Exchange themselves. Students, for instance, could be given a chili pepper (the physical interaction with the specimen enhances the overall experience) and be asked to trace the origins of the plant. After doing some research, students may discover the chili pepper’s indigenous roots to be of Mexican descent, but as a result of the Columbian Exchange, the pepper would travel across Europe and parts of Africa, eventually making its way to Asia. The chili pepper over time became very popular in India where it remains a staple in their diets, with Indians incorporating the chili pepper in their daily regimes 2 to 3 times a day. The chili pepper, in this instance, directly connects students to the past and allows them to imagine its travels while tangibly embodying a sense of human interconnectedness.

Teachers interested in other possible plant specimens and ideas for incorporating plants and nature into their instruction, could begin by examining the garden and table of America’s third president, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson’s love of nature and husbandry are richly embodied on the soil of his estate at Monticello. Thomas Jefferson throughout his adult life enjoyed growing and eating vegetables from around the world and would routinely have them incorporated into dishes for his family and guests. A Rich Spot of Earth (Hatch, 2012) is a resource for teachers, as it highlights the cosmopolitan nature of Mr. Jefferson’s garden; Peter Hatch refers to it as the “Ellis Island” (p. 6) of gardens in light of its vegetables from around the world. “The Vegetable Garden” featured at the official site for Monticello is a great resource for teachers interested in more information about Jefferson’s garden and may be helpful for those considering incorporating nature into instruction.

**Sampling to Illustrate the Ramifications of Decisions in a Global Society**

Sampling is a unique strategy with origins in Hip-Hop Based Pedagogy that combines two distinct artifacts or events into the new production of knowledge, much like a music producer incorporates different sounds or beats into a new piece of music (Petchauer, 2012). Within the social studies classroom, sampling can be used to juxtapose an event from United States history for example, with a global topic or event. Students would examine both events (or possibly more) and in doing so, make new connections, resulting in new knowledge and a more dynamic understanding. Sampling in this particular scenario helps propel students toward the realization that events and decisions (even those confined within a nation’s borders) often have global ramifications. The following illustration sheds additional light on the potential of sampling in making global connections and may also serve to clarify how the strategy works.

Sampling can be used to enhance instruction about the institution of slavery. When studying slavery, students could first explore the lived experiences of former slaves in the United States using the Works Progress Administration (WPA) project, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. This WPA project, housed within the Library of Congress’s online collection “American Memory,” represents an effort to capture the lived experiences of former slaves in the United States through individual first-hand accounts. Students could navigate narratives on the site and begin to document or list some of the hardships endured by these individuals. Teachers interested in using the Library of Congress’s *Slave Narratives* should first visit the site’s “A Note on the Language of the Narratives” (at the bottom of the screen page) regarding the method of transcription used to record these interviews and review this information with students. Using knowledge gained from their search of the site as a base, students could then examine the lived experiences of slaves today. In doing this, students may be alarmed at the realization that the institution still exists. Free the Slaves is an
organization dedicated to emancipating slaves in the 21st century and has an abundant supply of resources and media to help students learn about slavery in the contemporary world. Using the site’s rich repository of information (which includes interviews with former slaves) students could develop a generative list of common struggles endured by these individuals and begin to juxtapose both lists. By juxtaposing the struggles endured by both groups, students may arrive at the conclusion that slaves today face similar hardships to those enslaved in the United States before the American Civil War. (The juxtaposition of knowledge toward the production of new knowledge is the core intent of sampling.) Interjecting a question similar to this can facilitate student thinking: “What circumstances allowed slavery to proliferate during both periods?” Students then begin to see how slavery (past and present) is embedded in the global economy and the decisions made by governments and individuals.

The types of connections harnessed by sampling are meaningful and can result in a much more robust conceptual understanding for students. The possibility of teaching social studies through an internationalist lens, for example, is explored in Stephen Thornton (2005). This resulted in additional suggestions for teachers. One such suggestion included pairing instruction on the Articles of Confederation and its impotencies with problems that have hovered the United Nations Charter (p. 88). Though Thornton does not use the term sampling in his work, the amount of overlap and points of agreement may be obvious for most readers. His work here will support teacher convictions regarding the need for global connections in the social studies classroom, a cause for which sampling offers an effective avenue for attaining such ends in view.

**Conclusion**

Making global connections in the social studies classroom is a challenge for many teachers (Cogan & Grossman, 2009; Merryfield & Kasai, 2010; Zong, 2009). Factors that stymie teacher efforts in this area may include a lack of preparation; an insufficient knowledge base concerning global education, content, and matters; a paucity of classroom time needed to effectively explore these connections; and an assumption that global connections are not intrinsically connected to social studies content when compared to other NCSS themes. This article as such, represents a response to these concerns or factors. This response is couched not only in global education literature, but also in my experience as a middle school teacher and supervisor of future teachers. The strategies symbolize an attempt to converge both theory and practice by distilling a list of practical suggestions for teachers that are informed by recognized principles of global education that effectively capture its affordances.

It is my belief that global connections represent an opportunity for teachers to connect with students by demonstrating the overarching relevance of the social studies to their everyday lives. As Walter Parker (2010) reminds us,

> Social studies is at the center of a good school curriculum because it is where students learn to see and interpret the world—its peoples, places, cultures, systems, and problems; its dreams and calamities—now and long ago. In social studies lessons and units of study, students don’t simply experience the world, but are helped systematically to understand it, to care for it, to think deeply and critically about it, and take their place on the public stage, standing on equal footing with others.” (p. 3).

If viewed through the global connections lens, Parkers’ words may serve as a catalyst and source of encouragement regarding the need for global connections in the social studies classroom. Students are intrinsically curious about the world and if we fail as educators to unveil the
interconnectedness of the human experience we risk altering that organic interest. The strategies presented here are not a quick remedy to the underlying factors that often thwart attempts to make global connections in the classroom, but rather serve to provide teachers with a glimpse into the practical.

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