

## Feature Article

### *Internationalizing Schools to Build Global Competence: Some Considerations for Teachers*

*Laura C. Engel, The George Washington University*

#### **Introduction**

In the U.S. there has been a recent and growing focus on educating for global competence (see, e.g., [here](#) and [here](#)). The U.S. Department of Education launched its first ever [U.S. international strategy](#) in 2012 intended to strengthen the U.S. education system and advance U.S. international priorities. The three specific objectives include increasing global competences, learning from other countries, and engaging in education diplomacy. Despite the increased focus on enhancing international perspectives in education, it is not always clear to practitioners what internationalization of education or educating for global competence means at the school level, and how it can be built into current school practice. This article focuses on three questions:

1. Why is fostering global competence through education important?
2. What does internationalization of education or educating for global competence mean?
3. How might practitioners build internationalization at the school level?

In examining these three questions, my aim is to introduce comprehensive internationalization as a powerful mechanism for enriching students' global competence and cultural proficiency.

#### **Why is fostering global competence through education important?**

*“All Americans, regardless of chosen profession, require global competence to function in a world where diversity, global engagement, and competition are the norm”* (see video [here](#)).

Educating for global competence in the U.S. is often promoted as a necessary response to societal changes stemming from globalization. Societies around the world are becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. At a global level, there are approximately 232 million international migrants ([United Nations, 2013](#)). Diversity resulting from increased global movement of people is reflected in the U.S., where one in eight residents is foreign born ([U.S. Bureau of Census, 2010](#)) and approximately 21% of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home ([Ryan, 2013](#)). Global competence helps provide young people with the attitudes and skills to live within such a diverse society. Beyond increased societal diversity, there have been powerful economic transformations. Students will enter an economy where jobs are no longer fixed to their local community, which requires skills in cross-cultural communication, foreign languages, and global understanding, as well as non-cognitive skills such as flexibility, creativity, and curiosity. Globalization has also facilitated (and been facilitated by) new technological advances, which have allowed ideas, products, and news events to traverse borders with ease, enabling students, teachers, and the public to become hyper-connected locally and globally. In such a transformed global world, there are additional arguments that global competence is key to ensuring national security (e.g. [Council on Foreign Relations, 2012](#)) and enhancing diplomacy efforts.

Global competence is also thought to give the U.S. an edge in the increasingly competitive education and economic landscape. In the wake of the recent [2012 Programme for International](#)

[Student Assessment \(PISA\) results](#), the U.S. has once again been confronted with messages about its lagging education system and the need to “keep up” with the rest of the world. Despite researchers’ cautioning about the dangers in using a single average achievement score as a comprehensive measure of educational quality (see, e.g., [this special issue](#), edited by Engel and Williams, 2013), policy-makers, reformers, and the media still often use average scores to make claims about a stagnating U.S. system and the need for improvement. Among these calls for reform is an urging for enhanced global competence as a key to increased competitiveness on a global level.

The push to build global competence through education is not without its challenges. Time for curriculum planning and innovation is limited. Schools are often burdened by increased standards and test-based accountability. Many schools have limited technology and library resources, teacher planning time, and access to professional development opportunities to build teacher capacity. Moreover, there are a myriad of approaches to internationalizing schools and building global competence, and at times a lack of concrete ideas. The following sections aim to present some concrete definitions and considerations for moving ideas into practice.

### **What does internationalization of education and educating for global competence mean?**

Below are two concrete definitions of global competence:

- The [National Education Association \(2010\)](#) defined global competence as “the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues, an appreciation of and ability to learn and work with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, proficiency in a foreign language, and skills to function productively in an interdependent world community” (p. 1). It has four components: (1) International awareness, (2) Appreciation of cultural diversity, (3) Proficiency in foreign languages, (4) Competitive skills.
- In another widely accepted definition (including in the U.S. Department of Education’s international strategy), the [Asia Society](#) defines global competence as the “capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance” (p. xi). The core of their framework is “to understand the world through disciplinary and interdisciplinary study,” which also has four components: (1) Investigate the world, (2) Recognize perspectives, (3) Communicate ideas, (4) Take action. The Asia Society has also developed a [global competence framework](#) for assessing outcomes.

Internationalization of education is a process that helps foster global competence through incorporating “international, intercultural, and global dimensions” into the operations, institutional context, and teaching/learning process in order to nurture attitudes, beliefs, skills, and dispositions of individuals that enable them to engage in their local, national, and global communities ([Knight, 2008](#), p. ix). Knight (2008) defined two approaches to internationalizing universities: outward and inward. Applying this definition to K-12 schools, outward approaches (or internationalization abroad) focus on cross-border mobility of students and teachers. Examples include student and pre-service teacher study abroad, and in-service teacher exchanges. In contrast, inward approaches (or internationalization at home) concentrate on building students’ international understanding and intercultural skills. Activities might include

international education week events, Model UN, student clubs, international pen pals, and sister city relationships. Many of these practices and activities have been in existence for some time, though at times they are isolated to specific groups of students, classrooms, programs, or schools, and not well-integrated into the institutional context of school systems.

Comprehensive internationalization involves both inward and outward approaches, and is “an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility” ([Hudzik, 2011](#), p. 6). Rather than a select set of activities isolated to a specific group of students or teachers, comprehensive internationalization instead infuses it through all curricular content, as well as the institutional culture of a system or school. However, often implementation of comprehensive internationalization is limited by a number of prevailing assumptions. I address five of these below:

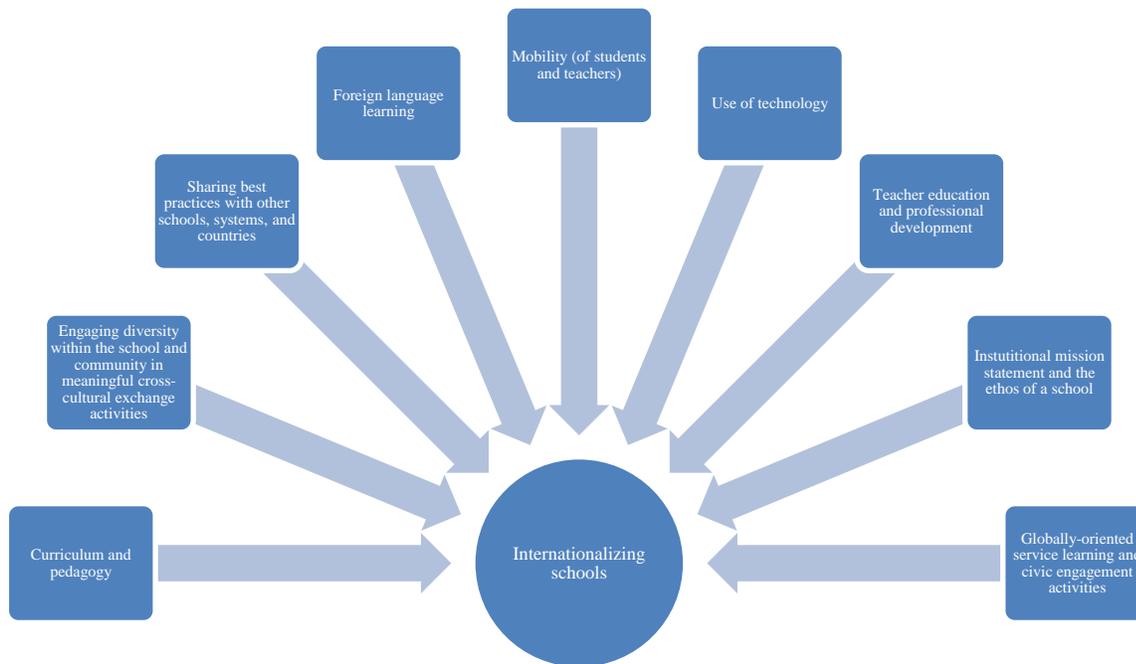
1. *To internationalize schools and build global competence education, students and teachers must go abroad.* Study abroad and international exchange offers powerful learning opportunities. However, international mobility is limited to a small fraction of the student and the teacher populations. Roughly 14% of U.S. undergraduate students study abroad before graduation ([Institute of International Education, 2013](#)). Of all study abroad college students, only 4% of education majors participate ([Institute of International Education, 2013](#)), and few in-service teachers participate in exchange programs. Among secondary students, recent data also show that one high school student out of 10,800 participates in a semester or year-long exchange program ([CSIET, 2012-2013](#); [Mapping the Nation, 2013](#)). Even for those students and teachers who do participate in a study abroad or an international exchange experience, it does not necessarily ensure the development of global competence. These factors point to the need for both teachers who study abroad and the vast majority who do not to continue to discover resources and experiences to connect and relate with students on a day-to-day level.
2. *The global is something “out there” that students and teachers either need to travel abroad to “experience” and “get,” or which is disconnected from students’ lives.* There is a predominant assumption that the global is something to experience and get outside the borders of the U.S. A different and deeper approach might instead consider and connect societal transitions at local, national, and global levels. For example, students might be asked to consider the unrest in Kiev, Ukraine with problems and issues encountered in their own communities.
3. *Increasing the supply of internationalized content and resources available to teachers will lead to the internationalization of schools.* There are a growing number of organizations focused on global education resources, which are arguably positive developments. However, in a context of increased demands on schools and limited teacher time, it can be easy for these resources to be used in one-off or isolated ways, similar to what [Skelton, Wigford, Harper, and Reeves \(2002\)](#) referred to as the foods, festivals, and flags approach, or not used at all. A deeper approach would integrate globally-focused resources and activities into entire cognitive domains, established lesson plans, and be linked to the institutional mission and ethos of a school.

4. *Content and what is taught is the key to internationalizing U.S. schools.* Of course, what is taught in schools matters. However, at times the push for internationalized content overshadows delivery and *how* material is taught. More comprehensive approaches emphasize student-centered learning and the investigation of the connections between the self and the global world.
5. *The presence of growing cultural diversity within classrooms, schools, and communities automatically leads to cross-cultural relationships and global competence.* As a whole, there is a lack of curricular and extra-curricular programs designed to foster mutual learning among domestic and international students aimed at developing cross-cultural relationships and global competence. Since the vast majority of students in secondary schools do not participate in an international exchange (and if trends continue, a vast majority will not participate in study abroad as undergraduate students), developing learning environments within schools that complement foreign language learning and other curricular developments may have positive effects on students' global competence. Recent research also suggests the positive impact on developing collaborations between schools and international families as a way to build global competence (Day, 2013 in [Shaklee and Baily, 2013](#)).

### **Beyond the assumptions: Building comprehensive internationalization at the school level**

The prevailing assumptions about how to internationalize schools illustrate the dominance of mobility-based and content-based approaches. These can be significant and positive for participants and institutions. However, to embed internationalization into the institutional context of U.S. schools and to provide opportunities for all students to gain global competence, more comprehensive approaches are needed. Figure 1 presents some of the prominent “levers” that enhance comprehensive internationalization at a school-level.

Figure 1: Approaches to Internationalizing Schools



In exploring how to move internationalization from an abstract concept into concrete practice, it is important to consider comprehensive internationalization as a process, rather than a single result. It requires the integration of both inward and outward strategies, as well as a commitment by educational actors at school, local, state, and federal levels. Teachers are especially implicated, as they are on the front-lines of bringing global competence to students and classrooms. Therefore, encouraging teachers to deepen their knowledge base and reflection on these dimensions is important. How teachers interpret internationalization and education for global competence directly influences what they teach and how they teach it. Ample opportunities are therefore needed for teachers to explore not only how to implement comprehensive internationalization strategies, but how they come to understand internationalization within the context of their own lives and *why* global competence education is significant.