

GLOBAL LEARNING



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A PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT COLLEGE INTERNATIONALIZATION WITHIN A PEDAGOGY OF POSITIVE TOLERANCE

A CONVERSATION...

RAHEL — So, when can we meet and put our presentation together? What about this Wednesday night?

ALA — That works for me.

PREETI — I won't be at school that day.

RAHEL — All day?

PREETI — Yeah, its Navaratri and my parents want me to be at the temple. Let's meet Thursday evening instead.

RAHEL — I can't do that; Rosh Hashanah starts on Thursday evening. I think we have to meet on the weekend.

ALA — That doesn't work for me! My parents are weird. If it's the weekend, they assume I'm going to see a boy, and they are worried I'll meet someone who's not Romanian. They freak out about that.

RAHEL — O.K., let's meet at your place then. We clearly aren't boys!

ALA — Sure. But my parents really only speak Romanian; I can barely understand their French!

Now cue the laughter and exchanges of knowing looks as these college students finish determining the best time to work on an assignment for my class. It is just one example from my classroom that reveals the tacit internationalization that is taking place in my college. I want to explore one way that colleges may explicitly internationalize from “the grassroots” with what I call “global learning.” Global learning fosters internationalization in the most productive place to do so: the classroom. The classroom is a strategic space for establishing positive tolerance, which is an engaged, constructive practice of negotiating social difference. Negative tolerance, a form of avoidance or trivialization of difference, is not only an unrealistic option within the compulsory spaces of classrooms and within today's world. In what follows, I wish to explain what global learning and positive tolerance are, give some examples of implementation and justify this teaching philosophy.

GLOBAL LEARNING, COLLEGE INTERNATIONALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Global learning starts by acknowledging the students' experiences of globalization and diversity, which is then leveraged and expanded through teaching that makes use of both local and remote resources through information and communication technologies (ICTs). Global learning supports the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS) intercultural education policy (1998) of opening of classrooms to global diversity. Although teacher mobility and formal curricular internationalization are complimentary, global learning starts with the people in the classroom. I feel it is an effective means of broader and deeper internationalization of Québec's colleges.

The discussion of internationalization usually involves college administrations and organizing bodies that assist college relations with federal and provincial actors such as CÉGEP Internationale, Association of Canadian Community Colleges. There are substantive social and economic benefits from developing students' international and intercultural competencies. The same could be said for developing such competencies among teachers, staff and administrators. Quebec's education milieu has historically recognized this.

Internationalization faces a problem, however: investments in student mobility face practical limitations of student access and opportunity. Only 1.1% of full-time students have participated in out-of-country learning experiences and full-time international students only represent 5.6% of the total full-time college population (ACCC, 2010). There are three challenges to student mobility: Being physically abroad is unaffordable; not simply because of finances, but due to inflexible or heavy home college curriculum. A lack of necessary language skills and a low awareness and commitment of faculty (*ibid.*) serve to compound these challenges. Global learning addresses the last two challenges with effects upon the first because it internationalizes from the bottom-up. Its foundational approach sets the stage for a practical realization of initiatives emanating from governments, administrations and associations.

Globalization also poses problems, to which internationalization is meant to respond. Learning how to live together amid difference is a core competency for student success in



a globalized world. Positive tolerance is a fitting concept that summarizes that competency. Humanity's overall future depends upon the development of people who are able to practice positive tolerance. Since the sources of globalization are socially constructed, making globalization "good" requires intelligent social actors. The international movement of people, information and goods is facilitated by migration and tourism, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and global transportation networks. These global phenomena present local challenges to sociability, i.e. the ways societies assemble their coherence and relations. Positive tolerance addresses this need.

▶ A KEY COMPETENCY: GLOBAL LITERACY

Globalization requires educational competencies that enable the negotiation of differences. Thérèse Laferrière (2005, 191) argues that one such competency is global literacy, without which students are susceptible to three kinds of ignorance:

1. Ignorance of cultural diversity.
2. Ignorance of collaborative skills.
3. Ignorance that an idea or thing can be improved.

The challenge for international education is to develop competencies that go beyond mere knowledge of others towards the respectful engagement of others. I will later argue that this is the difference between negative tolerance and positive tolerance. Mere knowing is to simply see others and continue clicking through the webpage or walking down the hallway. A globally literate society moves past gazing to engagement. Active engagement characterizes positive tolerance, developing a robustly self-critical consciousness vis-à-vis others and their differences. The mark of negative tolerance is that passive gaze which reserves for itself the caprice of turning away when faced with something subjectively uncomfortable or boring. A complementary competency is to understand when I have been recognized by someone who is other to me; it's the ability to question whether someone else is gazing or engaging. This is the reflexive competency of being aware of being encountered by an other. Our students need these competencies in order to improve ideas and things for the future. Global learning begins to address this complex need.

Global learning starts in the college classroom and not with student mobility. By engaging the actual diversity within colleges, it considers how to develop this tacit potential. Collegial education has this as one of its objectives: that students learn about themselves by encountering other people and new forms of knowledge. It also accomplishes a hoped-for

outcome of college education: to live well and benefit others amid the differences in human society. Students should come to know themselves better and be better equipped to live with others than had they not attended college. The introduction's conversation, where three female students negotiated their homework assignment, was the result of my simple approach to global learning.

▶ GLOBAL LEARNING IN PRACTICE

The Department of Humanities provides three compulsory courses to the students at Vanier College which are Worldviews, Knowledge and Ethics. The competencies expected by MELS for the humanities suit global learning perfectly: Knowledge courses require that students learn "how knowledge is defined, acquired, classified, transmitted and applied;" Worldviews courses focus on "how individuals, groups, societies or nations organize ideas, perceptions and values into explanatory patterns;" and the Ethics courses are designed to synthetically reinforce students' Humanities learning in order to, "develop a critical and autonomous approach to ethical values in general and to the values involved in their own fields of interest in particular" (MELS). While humanities, philosophy, arts and the social sciences seem most suitable for implementing global studies, I firmly believe that this approach has a place within other subjects and programs.

Vanier College is an amazingly globalized context that manifests the stories of humanity: differences meet each other and they must be negotiated. The constant interactions of languages, symbols, clothing and faces points towards the reality of deep and broad influences that were firmly set in place long before students reach college. Language, culture, law and religion name some of the social influences that require negotiation; and there is a positive correlation between an increase of social interaction and the production of differences (e.g., see Tamanaha 2008). Since birth, many students have been exposed to successive waves of globalization by way of media technologies, coursework, peer-pressure, organized student groups, and last but not least: the marketing of private interests. Linguistic, cultural, legal and religious divergence is their reality. I am privileged to experience the complex, inter-relatedness diversity that composes Vanier's body politic.

Last year I attended a teaching workshop in the U.S.¹, where Eugene Gallagher told me: don't do anything that the students

¹ The Wabash Center's 2011 workshop on "Writing The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion" [<http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/programs/article.aspx?id=21454>].



can do themselves. Students are amenable to social interaction, which is where learning to live with difference begins. Students learn deeply when they co-create their knowledge. Here is where global learning inserts international content. It takes place within pedagogical structures that demand the students to autonomously and collaboratively draw upon international resources in order to accomplish their learning objectives. I can offer three examples from my teaching.

The first example comes from my Worldviews (345-102-MQ) course. By the third week, I have organized students into groups which then must choose a developing country. Each group then creates a presentation that reports on the country's recent history in relation to its development indicators in order to predict whether the country will accomplish the two Millennium Development Goals² they agreed to study. I arrange the groups based upon some very tentative, surface-level differences that I perceive (gender, language, culture). Quite often, the group will choose the "home country" of one member. The level of intensity and excitement clearly rises when students can cross-check personal testimony with academic sources. These group projects require plenty of negotiation, which I can observe and manage over the course of several stages of in-class research.

My Knowledge (345-101-MQ) course concentrates upon the philosophy of religion as a field of knowledge which my students learn to recognize, utilize and synthesize its main components. I ask the students to do short, personal presentations to learn about epistemology, metaphysics and semantics. Each student presents one analysis of a media example perceived to somehow qualify as 'religious.' The assignment makes it possible for students to explain to others something they might have wondered about, for example: the existence of holy water, kissing the black stone at the Kaa ba, burning incense for ancestors, receiving Darshan or wearing a Nazar. The student must locate the media within people's actual religious life, and then explain one metaphysical claim made by the example, the semantic content specific to that claim, and the epistemological means by which the claim and its content is conveyed in religious life. Since it is delivered as an in-class presentation, the assignment serves to establish the global potential of the students, and it creates the grounds for recognition of differences to be drawn upon later in class.

Finally, my involvement in a "virtual team-teaching" (VTT) project supported by the Quebec-Canada Entente was an exercise in global learning. VTT itself is the use of ICTs and Web 2.0 tools to connect geographically-separated classrooms into one class. My Ethics course last term (345-HSA-VA) was

co-taught with André Alizzi and his students at CÉGEP Sept-Îles. It is rare for Sept-Îles students to have classmates who are newcomers to Canada; likewise, Vanier students rarely have classmates who are from Northern Quebec. Global learning was already accomplished through our regular interactions with videoconferencing and Moodle-based³ assignments. Having guest videoconference presenters from New Delhi and London greatly expanded students' global literacy.

"Global" is being used here in several senses. Global learning presumes that human learning is convergent because the entirety of human knowledge is always a human production.

BASELINE GLOBAL LEARNING

Baseline global learning encourages global literacy when teachers arrange in-class activities that require students to interact and get to know each other's worlds. Our student bodies are not socially homogeneous, and global learning takes advantage of this enormous asset. Indeed, the potential for global literacy would be enhanced with greater immigration and increased international student attendance. One outcome of globalization is that our college communities are increasingly well-travelled. With preparation, students also easily take the lead in engagement with international resource persons who have been invited into the classroom. Furthermore, the ease of videoconferencing brings real-time international presence. I have used VIA to host a guest from London, and Skype to facilitate another guest from New Delhi. Teaching with active learning and problem-based assignments that have substantive international dimensions adds to this, but greater depth of global learning takes place when assignments require the use of ICTs and Web 2.0 tools to connect with international resources, students and audiences. In short, it is very easy to move from baseline global learning to an advanced global learning classroom!

"Global" is being used here in several senses. Global learning presumes that human learning is convergent because the entirety of human knowledge is always a human production. The enterprise of knowledge-making is always, ultimately, a human science. An anthropic principle guides this approach to teaching: it should be globally open to the entire range

² For more information on the Millennium Development Goals, go to the UN's Website [<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/millennium-development-goals.html>].

³ Moodle is an open-source course-management website. For more information, please see: [<https://moodle.org/>] et [<http://portail.moodle.declic.qc.ca/>].



of human practices and media. Global learning expressly considers the dynamics of convergence amid the technologies and effects of globalization such that the scope of learning opportunities obtains a global scale. Deliberately seeking out non-Western resources for content and guests is how global learning proceeds with critical awareness of the Eurocentric and colonial heritage of the world.⁴ First and second-generation immigrant students will already have a clear and present sense of this where other students will not. Substantive engagement with global sources contextualizes and valorizes the plurality within the classroom. The historical and current forces that shape students' experience of globalization need to be explored in order to address two globally-ignorant presumptions: this is how the world has always been, and, this is the only world there might be. Learning the tragic mistakes that have made the world what it is disabuses students from taking it for granted. By making this integral to pedagogy, students can get the message that their knowledge and skills should be ways towards a better world. Global learning recognizes and builds upon the tacit potential residing within the college classroom.

THE SOCIAL PRESENCE OF THE CLASSROOM

Web-based media and other ICTs present a clear and present threat to global learning, however, despite the fact that these are also the most apparent means for global learning! The teacher's role in global learning is to create the preconditions of background skills and knowledge for the encounter and then to facilitate formative knowledge development afterwards. But the global classroom must not be education through tourism; the global learning teacher must consciously circumvent the reduction of others to images.

Most web-based tools are experienced asynchronously. The use of web-based tools can be interactive, but that interaction is disjointed; it tends at best towards observation, response and waiting. At worst, it tends towards gazing, clicking and quitting. Others become matters of convenience. One click or gesture, and they are gone. Web-based ICTs have an exemplary ability to make others disappear at the user's convenience. They geometrically magnify the aesthetic, trivialization of others. Therefore, ICTs facilitate negative tolerance. Here is the preeminent pedagogical danger of ICTs: left to their own devices and interfaces, these mediums' message is twofold. First, others don't matter if you don't mind. Secondly, you don't matter because others don't mind.⁵ Global ignorance emanates and builds from this danger.

If global learning is to use web-based tools and ICTs, these tools require social presence. In a context where 'social media'

are often asynchronous, it must be emphasized that social presence requires real-time, specific connections with actual persons. Therefore, the global learning teacher must always insist upon encounter, experience and reflection. Web-based tools counteract global ignorance when they are used synchronously.

The potential effects of globalization on our society are ambivalent. Left adrift, globalization and the diversity it introduces to our colleges can foster the kinds of ignorance that jeopardizes our colleges and our societies. The strong tendency towards ignorance to which humans are subjected by ICTs is most effectively diminished by immigration and real-time socialization. There is no risk in overemphasizing that global learning requires social presence. Baseline forms of global learning therefore can only take place in the classroom. Firstly, such learning is active and thereby dependent upon students themselves. Secondly, the classroom is a compulsory space where difference and discomfort cannot be avoided. Finally, the people within a classroom are in a provisional space. The very notion of learning entails movement and change. In the case of global learning, the movement is towards the experience of difference and the change its towards the adoption of competencies for positive tolerance. Thus, the more diverse a student body, the greater the potential for global learning. Implementing internationalized curriculum and web-based tools builds upon that necessary baseline of a diverse student body politic.

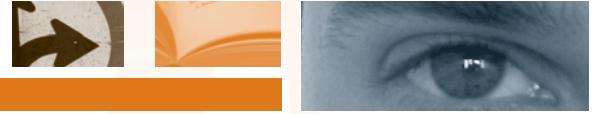
The classroom is in fact the leading edge of collegial internationalization. Other forms of internationalization depend upon students' opting-in. As one of the few remaining relatively "quiet" spaces in students' public lives, the classroom where the conditions can be set to attenuate the speeds and efficiencies that exacerbate global ignorance. It is very hard to opt-out of or escape in-class engagements with difference.

PEDAGOGY OF POSITIVE TOLERANCE

My philosophy is that teaching demands an active relationship with social diversity. There is a difference between negative

⁴ Along the lines of Richard King's argument for religious studies, general education requires a readjustment of its 'border controls' (see King 2009; Mignolo, 2000). Global learning can do this in several ways: seriously considering the work of non-Western scholars, recognizing the trans-national nature of human social phenomena, as well as recognizing the transformations of such phenomena due to the constant movements of people, goods and information.

⁵ This is a paraphrase of Chuck D's rapping on the Public Enemy track "Makes You Blind." "You don't matter, and they don't mind. These be the things that makes ya blind."



tolerance, “not reproducing overt stereotypes” (Höpken 2004, 142), and positive tolerance. Positive tolerance is to actively create the conditions that diminish stereotyping, racism and bigotry. Positive tolerance requires that members of society develop the competencies that enable them to:

1. Experience and understand cultural diversity.
2. Actively engage collaborative skills.
3. Believe that ideas and things can be improved.

Positive tolerance is not as easy as negative tolerance, which can be practiced by clicking or turning away from others. The competencies of positive tolerance require the difficult work of personally confronting what is intolerable and non-negotiable. Going out, inviting in, and engaging with people's differences is demanded by positive tolerance. Adam Seligman drives this point home in his critique of what I called negative tolerance:

“By framing our difference from alter's position or action in terms of tastes or the trivial[e.g. dance, dress, diet and dialect], we are not forced to engage with it and can maintain an attitude of indifference” (2002, 1648).

While dance, dress, diet and dialect are not trivial *per se*, introducing and then leaving them on the surface-level abandons substantive pathways towards facing and negotiating difference. Negative tolerance is not actual tolerance, but denial in the forms of aestheticization and trivialization. Seligman notes that this is a way of eliding rather than realizing the differences that make necessary the possibility of tolerance (*ibid.*). The ultimate goal of global learning is positive tolerance, which involves real and tangible confrontations that come from the hard work of serious engagement with people who are different from oneself.

My teaching philosophy is that critical thinking rests upon positive tolerance. Critical thinking is the *sine qua non* of teaching, and it depends upon the ability to deal constructively with difference. Positive tolerance denies the vague relativist avoidance of “were all the same, after all, let's just get along” of negative tolerance. Instead, it promotes a robust comparative competency that engages differences.

“Only by making disagreement intelligible is it possible to respect the beliefs of others enough to appreciate that they are considered *really true*. To appreciate this is, *ipso facto*, to disagree with them when they seem to us to contradict our own commitments” (Arnold 2005, 216).

A globalized world requires constant negotiation, and *a priori* appeals to universals are intellectual shortcuts that short-change our students” critical thinking skills.

I think teachers have a worldwide obligation to teach positive tolerance. If students are to learn that ideas and things can be improved, then they should be exposed to the global heterogeneities of culture, religion and ethnicity. Students need to be introduced to the notion that they can propose social innovations that will enable them to live together with difference. Any attempt to displace global diversity with homogeneities of empire, nation or language will be inadequate to the challenges of globalization. The “North Korea option,” the avoidance of difference, is neither socially nor economically feasible in today's world.

Negative tolerance is not actual tolerance, but denial in the forms of aestheticization and trivialization.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Global learning is a pathway towards student success in a globalized world. It recognizes the personal faces of globalization that flow throughout our classrooms and colleges by actively collaborating with students who live in a globalized world. Such critical engagement with globalization fosters global competencies that our students need, and it creates momentum for internationalization. Simple practices and selective use of technology makes constructive steps towards global literacy and positive tolerance. Global learning begins with teachers who personally recognize the relevance of positive tolerance as integral to their vocation. ◀

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Both the English- and French-language versions of this article have been published on the AQPC website with the financial support of the Quebec-Canada Entente for Minority Language Education.