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Global Education in Middle Grades: Editorial Remarks

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Editorial Remarks: Global Education in Middle Grades

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We live in a world in which cultural boundaries are shrinking in this global era. Global education, broadly defined as *the process of teaching and learning about an interconnected world and individuals' role as global citizens*, becomes a necessary practice. It invites us to see beyond our own national context and see ourselves as part of the larger, global world. Given that global education is a way to understand the “self” in relation to the “other” in this interconnected world, its importance is undeniable. Yet, how does the middle grades community prepare teachers and students to engage in global education? What instructional approaches are recommended to promote young adolescents' global perspectives and cross-cultural understanding? What are the trends of research on global education in the middle grades field?

This special themed issue, *Global Education in Middle Grades*, was prompted by these questions. The issue reflects the core value of the *Middle Grades Review* (MGR): “[to] broaden the discourse of middle grades education by challenging conventional wisdom.” The contributing authors in this issue will broaden our knowledge and challenge our understanding of global education by presenting new and critical perspectives. The articles, in each category of essay, research, response, and practitioner perspective, will invite the middle grades community to consider diverse views and approaches of global education. Although the authors discuss different topics under the broader framework of global education, they all provide important suggestions for continued research and practice for the further development of the field of middle level education.

Specifically, Malu opens her discussion on global education by posing this fundamental question to the reader: *Do we need global education in the middle?* In her essay, she invites us as middle grade educators to reflect on the question and recounts the brief history of global education within the middle school movement. The definition of global education is introduced by linking it to global perspective, global literacy,

and global awareness. In discussing the constructs of the dimensions of development (e.g., physical, intellectual, moral, and social-emotional), Malu constantly provides thoughtful questions for us to think about challenges and possibilities with relation to global education. In exploring these questions, the author encourages us to reexamine our role as members of the middle grades community. Based on her professional and personal experiences in international contexts, Malu offers several important recommendations to advance the field of middle grade education. The initial question that she posed is actually used as a way to emphasize the necessity of global education in the field of middle grades education.

Like Malu, Demarest also discusses the need of global education in the middle grades community, but her approach is slightly different. In her essay, *Learning Locally, Understanding Globally*, Demarest stresses the idea of making connection between local and global issues. She invites middle grades educators to pay more attention to local places through place-based education to develop students' perspectives about the world. Demarest argues that when students engage in activities about “how things function in actual places” which also address global issues within the context of local community, they become more aware of their own role in the world. Her essay may challenge our preconceived notions that global education focuses only on global phenomena without considering local issues.

Our understanding of global education is expanded through the following two research-based articles. In the article, *A Review of Trends in the Scope of International Scholarship in Middle Level Education: Mapping the Terrain*, Virtue, Ellerbrock, and Mainand report on their review of middle grade related publications by focusing on the trends of international content and perspectives. The article discusses whether or not U.S.-based middle grades publications reflect international scholarship as well as which patterns are portrayed in such publications. The authors note that “the editorial slant of much of the scholarship in the field has appeared to have

a notably Americentric bias that has hindered the pursuit of universal truths about young adolescent education.” These claims invite us to reexamine our mono-cultural identities and bias. The authors suggest that we must go beyond national boundaries in order to advance the scholarship in middle grades education. The authors provide specific suggestions, such as expanding worldwide networks of scholars and promoting more high-quality international scholarship, which are important to consider.

Next, Tamerat’s article, *Funds of Knowledge and Global Competence in Urban Middle School*, details her qualitative study in an urban middle school setting. The study examined middle grades teachers’ understanding of utilizing students’ funds of knowledge (e.g., culturally accumulated knowledge from home and community environments) in the process of developing global competence (e.g., global topics, dispositions, skills, and actions). The major findings show that the teachers have an understanding of the concepts (e.g., funds of knowledge and global competence), but few know how to synthesize them in practice. While the funds of knowledge from immigrant and/or economically privileged White students (e.g., international travels) were recognized in pursuit of global competence, those of knowledge from non-immigrant, minority, and low-income students were not. The findings challenge our assumption that urban teachers who work with diverse students from various backgrounds “would be well positioned to teach in ways that promote global competence.” The study provides implications on how middle grades teachers can leverage *all* students’ culturally informed knowledge to extend instruction on global perspectives.

Followed by these two research articles, Schaefer’s essay, *The Pandemic as Pedagogical Provender: A Response to “The Global Pandemic as Learning Opportunities about the World: Extending School Curriculum,”* engages us to view the pandemic from a unique lens: a pedagogical provender. As a way to respond to Yoon’s article (2020) that focused on how to use the pandemic to promote students’ *critical global literacies* (Yoon, 2016), an integrated approach of critical, global, and multicultural literacies, Schaefer situates her arguments in a historical context. Schaefer confirms Yoon’s perspectives on the need of an integrative approach, but she goes further. She provides rationales within the context of the history of

middle grades movement. Her in-depth discussion allows Yoon’s work to be historically and conceptually grounded. The response is based on the author’s personal and professional experiences and sheds light on how middle grades students and teachers can engage in authentic dialogues across countries based on common experience that we have endured during the pandemic. The author encourages us to reexamine this pandemic in order to improve our students’ view of diverse world communities. Schaefer’s response implies that the pandemic isolates us from each other, but also creates opportunities to connect people around the world and to better understand diverse communities. Her concept of the pandemic as a pedagogical provender is manifested through her examples in her essay.

This special issue also includes practitioner perspectives. Through the following two research-based articles, we as middle grades educators will learn how we can engage youth in both grade-level content and critical global education. Specifically, Caires-Hurley, Jimenez-Silva, and Harrington encourage us to approach a problem-based learning with a critical lens through their article, *Toward a Critical-PBL: Centering a Critical Consciousness in the Middle Grades*. The article explains the process of redesigning lessons on problem-based learning with justice-based pedagogies, taken on by teacher candidates. The purpose of redesigning lessons toward a *critical* problem-based learning is to empower young adolescents “to become socially responsible and critically conscious world citizens.” In reading this article, middle grades educators can learn how to teach youth grade-level content while promoting critical consciousness for global education.

Finally, this issue introduces an article by Nix-Stevenson, Shelton, and Smith entitled *Fighting Back against Anti-Asian Xenophobia: Addressing Global Issues in a Distance Learning Classroom*. The authors highlight how social justice content can be integrated into curriculums with experiential education and design-based learning. By addressing the growing concerns of xenophobia and white supremacy in our society, the authors show how the teaching team prepared youth to challenge and counteract deep-rooted misconceptions about Asian people. The team’s instruction in the context of distance learning aims to prepare students to become “critically engaged global citizens.”

As shown in this brief overview of the articles, this issue will urge middle grades educators to consider the authors' various stances on and approaches to global education. As a guest editor of this issue, I first had the privilege of reading all of the articles. This experience confirms my understanding that there is not one single way to examine and promote global perspectives. Yet, I found that there are common elements in practicing global education and I summarize them with the examples from the articles.

First, global education utilizes the current reality and situation as resources to help young adolescents make connections between local and global issues (e.g., pandemic, funds of knowledge, place-based, problem-based, and experience-based). Second, global education needs to be coupled with a critical lens to encourage students to become critically conscious global citizens (e.g., justice-based, counteracting rooted misconceptions, xenophobia, and Americentric bias). Finally, global education needs to be integrated into the school curriculum to engage young adolescents for their successful learning (e.g., grade-level content and critical consciousness, and a pedagogical provender).

These elements demonstrate that it is a myth that global education should be taught under the social studies curriculum only. I believe it is the responsibility of all teachers across the curriculums to continue to seek ways of supporting young adolescents to become critically and socially responsible global citizens. The key elements above open possibilities for middle grades educators who may feel that it is daunting to implement global education under the pressure of meeting all curriculum standards. The components are also useful as a new framework for middle grades researchers who wish to conduct their studies on global education in various contexts and across curriculums.

In concluding these editorial remarks, I would like to thank the contributing authors for their insights and the reviewers for their expertise and time. My special thanks extend to MGR editors who have attended to my initial proposal of this issue and supported the project from beginning to end. This issue might be the first attempt in the middle grades field to discuss the issues of global education in a more comprehensive manner through diverse forms of writing including essay, research, and response; yet, it

should not be the last. The scholarship of global education is constantly growing and expanding with its diverse theoretical frameworks and approaches. As such, our scholarship of research and practice in the field of middle grades education should continue to develop and deepen. Promoting global perspectives is an essential way to live together by including everyone, not excluding one over the other. I hope that this issue will provide readers a way of thinking that will lead to this broad goal in this complex global society.

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