Teaching is a specialized profession where educators enter the field for many different reasons. Personally, I became a teacher because I wanted to try to improve the educational system based on the experiences I had going through my schooling. As I evolved as a teacher, I became more and more aware of how my students learned best, how outside influences affected my students in the classroom, and how our country viewed and valued education as a whole. With all the new trends and “flavor of the month” ideas we see as teachers each year, it is hard for new approaches and concepts to be taken seriously. I feel that in this technologically rich day and age, we have an obligation to our students to prepare them to become global learners through their use and understanding of technology. Global learning is not going to fade in to oblivion like so many other trends in education. It is a reality that the more our students know and understand the world around them, the better they, and us, as a country will be.

A major insinuation of teachers is that we are capable of learning and knowing how best to teach “all” of our students. Given the different cultures, home life, mentality towards school and everything else students bring with them to the classroom, this task becomes extremely difficult. As Randolph Bourne stated in his article, *Trans-national America* (1916), “America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors” (p. 15). Classrooms are becoming more and more diverse each year and the challenge of determining how students learn best is increasing as well. In my experience, you can treat this situation one of two ways: You can look at it as an inconvenience and a speed bump in your path to teaching; or you can embrace this diversity and start in your own classroom, teaching students about how to become global learners. I chose the latter of the two and use the diversity in my classroom, to begin the conversation about how we all have a duty to become global learners.

In my classroom, I feel my students learn best in three ways: 1.) collaboratively; 2.) kinesthetically; 3.) visually. I hated when I had to read about other people and cultures in a textbook and then spit out what I learned in some notes, only to be quizzed or tested on that material before we moved on to something else. That is not learning. To me, that was ignorance. At an early age, we need to make students enjoy their education and make them see that this is not a chore but an opportunity to broaden their minds and understanding of the world. As Merry Merryfield stated in her article, *Scaffolding Social Studies for Global Awareness* (2008), "When students become engaged in the world, its people or issues, they become excited and engrossed-as authentic knowledge and tasks of real life citizens are intrinsically interesting” (p. 366). In my classroom, it is very hard to excite my students by telling them they will be reading and taking notes on Africa. However, if I tell them that we will be learning about the culture of Africa through their music, art, dance, food and conversations with students in Africa, the subject becomes a little more interesting. I plan my lessons by looking back at those three ways I want my students to learn. I plan how my students will work together to construct meaning of what American culture is like. We see videos and pictures of places and people we are talking about to bring it to a more personal level. We hold conversations using technology with people half way across the world so both of our classrooms can see what the others look, sound, dress and act like. We learn and perform ritual dances, create native artwork using only the supplies they would have in Africa and listen and try to create music that they play in villages. All of these different forms of learning help make the students not only excited about learning, but also involved in becoming global citizens. The more they can understand about a culture or group of people, the more likely they are to accept them. Knowing how students learn can be a great bond between not only the students in my classroom, but with my students and people all over the world. Kwame Anthony Appiah, author of Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers, declares that we need to recognize that “human beings are different and that we can learn from each other’s differences” (p. 4). We are not going to be able to make this realization or come across this type of learning through reading stories in a textbook. I truly feel that global learning needs to start with the individual. Finding out how you like to learn and seeing how other people like to learn will open the door for my students to think “globally.” If they can understand why some schools in Africa do not have books and how they are still able to learn at a high level, then global learning can begin.

Gibson (et.al.) states, “a global-learning experience is more effective for the learners when a high degree of cultural contrast is achieved” (p. 13). Global learning needs to be project based where students from all different walks of life have the ability to add their unique understanding of the material towards the project. I hate when I see other teachers I work with, assign students a project with guidelines that are so rigid, it does not allow the students to express themselves the way they want to. Students are individuals, who have, as mentioned earlier, different cultures, upbringings, family situations, attitudes towards school and a laundry list of other differences that make them unique. Why should we stifle their individuality and limit what they are capable of just to meet the status quo? Learning, not just global learning, is best achieved when the student can relate to the material that is being presented. What works for one student, might not work well or at all for another. We need to allow the students to show their understanding in a way that is comfortable and unique to them so that they and the rest of the class can take something away from the project. It is not just how a student learns; a lot of learning has to deal with what we do not see at home. Some of our students live in such an environment, that it is a miracle they can even show up to school some days. If we try to force upon these students an institutionalized way of learning, of course it is going to be met with trouble. We can share and borrow ideas from each other in the classroom on how to learn, just like we can, and should be, sharing and borrowing ideas from other countries about how to learn about each other. In the pursuit of making our students “world citizens,” Gibson suggests we look at the conditions of our students and curriculum, to figure out where we all stand in regards to teamwork, modern communication technologies, and cultural contrasts (p. 13, Gibson et. al., 2008). My students complete their projects based on how they felt they wanted to express themselves, which directly shows the cultural contrasts in the classroom. Completing this process allows us to be able to work together a lot easier on ideas like learning about new technologies and 21st century skills.

The final aspect of my philosophy on global learning has to do with how our country views and values its educational system. America has long been a ‘land of opportunity,’ where dreams of immigrants could be realized in the realm of democracy. For a long time, we set the precedent in education and showed other countries what a quality, rigorous education could produce. Some people look to this influx of immigrants however, for the reason as to why our schools have decreased compared to other major industrialized countries. Research has shown recently, “that legal immigrants are, on average, better schooled than the native-born U.S. population” (Aleinikoff, 1998). Therefore, we cannot blame the immigrants coming in to this country and entering our schools. From the way it looks, they are ahead of their U.S. classmates before they even enter the room. The government, looking at countries such as China, England, and Japan, enacted legislation such as “No Child Left Behind” and more to try to correct our public education system and get back to being a leader in the field. This type of legislation though, in my mind, was rushed and not well thought out for the country as a whole. It put more pressure on teachers and was focusing in on the results of mandated tests to determine whether teachers, schools, districts/counties and ultimately states were successful. What happened was we panicked. We did not take into consideration how students learn or their backgrounds. We placed a higher value on the results of tests that were not as equitable as people thought they were, than the actual education itself. Looking at the local level, Wake County has lost track of its vision: “that students will demonstrate high academic growth; by 2014, all students will graduate on time and prepared to compete globally;” and is now more consumed with political agendas such as neighborhood schools and student busing. We have to be able to, locally as well as a country, get back to where we place more time and concern with our students rather than results. Granted, our country and its free public education system, has to deal with and worry about a lot of issues and policies that these other leading countries do not, but we cannot afford to use this as an excuse. I think our educational system is best surmised by what Appiah refers to as “fighting for the good.” With this idea, Appiah claims that “conflict arises most often when two peoples have identified the same thing as good” (p. 78). The reason I connect this idea to education is simple: we all want the best for our children and their education is important to all us. No one is in this profession to intentionally sabotage one person, gender, race or culture. We all ‘agree’ that our children should receive the best quality education as possible, but it is how they are to receive it that causes conflict. As I mentioned earlier, too often, politics and economics unfortunately affect what kind of education is provided to some students. As a result, ‘conflict’ comes about between groups of people that both want to help students, just in different ways. If you look at the Wake County situation, both sides on the neighborhood schools debate have stated their reasons for why their side is positive and beneficial for all students. Yet there is a lot of animosity over the idea of what’s ‘best’ for all students.

Global learning is an idea that is very significant in my classroom and what I want to teach my students. In my opinion, if we could have focused on this idea more, from an earlier time, we might not be in the situations that our country is in today. Whether it is the idea of Americanism, or ignorance, we have to make up for and be held accountable for our past, by how we want our future to unfold. Teaching students to be global learners and see the world as a whole, will hopefully make this a better place for future generations of educators.

Works Cited

Aleinikoff, T. A. (1998). A Multicultural Nationalism? We need ground rules to foster a

nation comfortable with cultural diversity. The American Prospect.

Appiah, K.A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers*. New York, N.Y.:

W.W. Norton & Company.

Bourne, R. (1916). Trans-national America. The Atlantic Monthly.

Gibson, K.L., Rimmington, G.M., & Landwehr-Brown, M. (2008). Developing global

awareness and responsible world citizenship with global learning. *The Roeper*

*Review*, *30*, 11-23.

Merryfield, M.M. (2008, November/December). Scaffolding social studies for global

awareness. *Social Education*, *72*(7), 363-366.

*WCPSS: Goal and mission*. (2008, December 2). Retrieved from

<http://www.wcpss.net/goal-mission/>