Diversity Blog can be found at <http://samonett.weebly.com/blog/global-cultural-awareness-in-the-classroom>

## [Global & Cultural Awareness in the Classroom](http://samonett.weebly.com/blog/global-cultural-awareness-in-the-classroom)

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As educators it is our job and responsibility to prepare our students for whatever may come next in their lives.  While much of that learning revolves around content standards, there is a larger responsibility to help each student become culturally and globally aware of the world in which they live (Hilt, 2011).  If you were to ask some of my students to list the places they have travelled during their lifetimes, many would have to say nowhere outside of the city we live in. For some, a twenty minute drive up the interstate to Chattanooga, Tennessee is a huge treat and they talk about it and write about it for months.  Working in a school with a high poverty rate has created a population of students who have rarely if ever traveled outside of a small circle on the map.  It is my duty as a teacher to provide as many learning experiences as possible.  When budgets get cut, field trips is one of the first things my school district cuts back on so I must provide these activities through the use of the Internet.

Along with the location isolation, also comes cultural isolation.  Thanks to the use of the Internet students from Dalton, Georgia can interact with students all over the world through the use of Web 2.0 tools such as [Skype](https://education.skype.com/), [KidBlog](http://kidblog.org/),[Wikispaces](https://www.wikispaces.com/), and many other interactive tools.  Not only can I have my seventh grade students look up information about the different biomes of the world, but I can have them blog and Skype with students who live in each of the biomes and hear the information directly from someone who lives there. They can then create a blog devoted to reflecting upon and sharing the information they have gained.  This adds an authenticity to the information and the students become more engaged in their learning. For students to understand and respect other cultures it is imperative to expose them to them any way possible and if you cannot do it in person, your best resource is the Internet that connects us to everyone.

When discussing diversity in the classroom it is important to realize we also must respect the diversity within our classroom in respect to learning needs not just cultural needs.  Differentiation is a buzz word that has been thrown around in education for many years now.  Smith and Throne (2009) suggest that differentiating the curriculum for students is critical to success in the middle school classroom because each child is developing at a varying pace.  While we understand the theory behind tweaking the curriculum to best fit the needs of each individual as a learner that can be rather difficult to implement when you have a class of thirty students who all have different needs.  To aide in this implementation our school district is encouraging teachers to utilize a learning management system (LMS), [Canvas](http://www.canvaslms.com/).  Other such LMS’s, [Blackboard Collaborate](http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Overview.aspx), [Brightspace](http://www.brightspace.com/), and [Moodle](https://moodle.org/) to name a few, all allow teachers to assign and differentiate what learning path each student is taking.  While all of the students in the classroom may be learning about ecosystems, the LMS allows the teacher to assign something to the entire class or certain individuals.  This helps with remediation as well as extension activities, which can often be forgotten because teachers are working so hard to help the struggling students.

Richardson (2012) argues that each child needs a personalized education not just personal learning. Making the leap from personal to personalized learning can be difficult and time consuming for the teacher, but it is needed.  If a student is allowed to learn all of their content based on what they enjoy, it takes on a whole new level of engagement and learning.  In my middle school my team of teachers is currently developing and implementing [Passion Projects](http://www.rundesroom.com/2013/11/passion-projects-in-classroom.html#comment-form)(Genius Hour) with our students.  Our goal in using Passion projects is to find what our students are really passionate about and then use that to steer their learning path in our content areas. For example, we currently have two young ladies who are passionate about creating a sensory room for some of our special needs students in the building.  In order to make this happen, these girls have learned math skills with measurements and budgeting, writing skills as they have reached out to the public for donations, and many other skills that they would not have gotten as easily in the traditional classroom.  While we have not perfected our implementation of having each student create their own learning path, we are at least trying and we are seeing positive results.  We are hoping to expand this to other teams within our building next school year.

During the beginning phase of our passion projects as we had students explore what their passion might be, many were choosing topics that involved helping others around the world. With the help of the Internet, researching specific needs across the globe is relatively easy and has broadened the scope that our students are aware of globally.  When I think about increasing students’ cultural and global awareness I am immediately taken to social media.  Tools such as[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/), blogs, podcasts, and numerous others all grant access for someone anywhere in the world to be in constant communication with someone else in a different location.  When a major event happens in one part of the world, social media is immediately filled with images, text, and videos about what is happening.  In the classroom this can be utilized to support instruction and not just seen as something students look at when they leave your room.

As teachers work to educate students on just how public the Internet is, I am seeing more and more pictures on social media where teachers are trying to prove how many people can see an image or video posted in a “private” account.  The same goal can be accomplished in the classroom by having students write blogs about a certain topic and tracking the location of users who view and comment on their blogs. It is amazing how quickly things spread around the world, not just down the street or into the community.

More teachers are turning towards the Internet to help them communicate and collaborate with parents and the community about events happening within the classroom and school.  Teacher websites, blogs, and even text messages using services such as [Remind](https://www.remind.com/), are becoming available in every school nationwide.  Sending home weekly or monthly newsletters is slowly going away and the electronic version is now available with the click of a button to retrieve from any computer or Internet equipped device. By setting up a class blog, a teacher can showcase student work, and communicate with students, parents, the community, and any other teacher or individual who may be interested in what is taking place.

The time is now for teachers to get on board with the idea of using the Internet in their classroom because it is certainly not going away.  As Edyburn (2006) argues, so many of the tasks we are used to completing in our daily lives outside of school have evolved and adapted due to the overwhelming presence of the Internet in our world.  It is time for education and educators to take hold and embrace the gift that has been given to us to not only educate the future generations, but also to make them more globally and culturally aware of the society in which we live.

References

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