Building capacity for global connections and collaborations - New perspectives

By Julie Lindsay

Snapshot

Julie Lindsay explores, in detail, the concepts underpinning how we support connections and collaborations in education using online technologies.

Based on
https://www.slideshare.net/julielindsay/new-perspectives-on-building-capacity-for-global-connections-and-collaborations

Introduction

Despite over 20 years of internet access in schools online global collaborative curriculum-based activities are not typical in the K-12 classroom. This paper explores new perspectives on theoretical constructs, pedagogies, strategies, skills and mindsets supporting connections and collaborations using online technologies. Initially exploring the practice of collaboration online, global collaboration is defined and examples provided of both synchronous and asynchronous modes of implementation. The educational benefits of, or the 'why should we bother?' with online global collaboration shares essential advantages of immersing learners are shared with a focus also on building future skills. Through design strategies and examples of successful approaches to online global collaborative learning the possibilities for online learning and intercultural understanding are revealed. Finally, the potential for pedagogical change is revealed with the introduction of the Global Collaborator Mindset as a bridge for educators and online learners into globally influenced learning.

Collaboration in the learning process

The digital revolution has provided a myriad of opportunities that will continue to change schools, and support learning connections and collaborations. The impact of digital technologies in schools has affected a paradigm shift affording learning modes that are social, interactive and open. In the broadest sense 'collaborative learning' is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. It is distinct from cooperation where tasks are distributed amongst learners. Collaboration, the building of something through participation and negotiation with partners, is pedagogically valuable because it takes coordination, continued attempt, construction and shared conception driving the iteration (Laurillard, 2012). In 'Here comes everybody', Clay Shirky states "Collaborative

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production is simple: no one person can take credit for what gets created, and the project could not come into being without the participation of many."

Mercer (2013) offered three complementary (not mutually exclusive) explanations of the effects of collaborative learning and dialogue on the development of children's reasoning. In the context of the K-12 classroom outcomes of collaborative learning include: appropriation (my ideas plus your ideas equals our collaborative artefact); co-construction (my ideas multiplied with your ideas equals a collaborative product that is greater than the mere sum of our separate efforts); and transformation (changing the way a person thinks and interacts with others, offers opportunity for transfer of skills).

... a shift from a world about "content" to a world about "context."

The video "Collaboration: On the Edge of a New Paradigm" (Collaborative Society, 2013) discusses a shift from a world about "content" to a world about "context". It shares the imperative of collaboration to solve global issues in health, society, science and economics. Arteaga (2012) researched outlier educators who used collaboration to formulate a digital pedagogy and concluded that what is needed is educator professional learning that adopts social interactive practices in conjunction with reorganisation of learning spaces (physical and virtual) to accommodate new modes of knowledge flow, as well as opportunities for learner connection, recombination and re-creation. As a paradigm shift online collaboration as a norm reflects the needs of a digital and networked world (Lee & Ward, 2013) and by its very nature, affords learners both synchronous and asynchronous modes to connect, collaborate and learn together, requiring key design and implementation skills of educators. Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) (Harasim, 2012) implies experiences and understandings that are place-independent, time-independent and support group and many-to-many learning scenarios. Changes from didactic to active learning and collaborative techniques has prompted a new theory of learning, Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) (Harasim, 2012) that focuses on "collaborative learning, knowledge building and Internet use as a means to reshape formal, non formal and informal education in the Knowledge Age" (p. 80). Yet despite internet adoption in the real world, teachers are reluctant to adopt new practices using this in the educational world (Harasim, 2012).

Online global collaboration defined

Online global collaboration, as distinct from technology integration or online collaborative learning communities, is where global (beyond the school and classroom) partnerships exist for the purpose of working and learning together on specific goals and co-creating new knowledge (Lindsay & Davis, 2012). In practical terms online global collaboration in the classroom means (Lindsay, 2016):

- Geographically dispersed learners;
- Use of online technologies to forge viable connection and communication;

- Learning is 'with' not just 'about'; and
- Collaborators share ideas online and collaborate to co-create new understandings.

With the advent of the internet and new technologies, online global collaboration has evolved from the 1.0 version of information exchange, to the 2.0 version where artefact exchange as well as information exchange takes place. With the development of faster internet and better technology tools, online global collaboration 3.0 allows learners to network, collaborate, co-create information and artefacts, and build knowledge together online and share this with others (Lindsay & Davis, 2012).

It is important to understand that the term 'global' in online global collaboration can also apply to more localised connections, for example in the same town or state, particularly within close time zones. In large multi-time zone countries like the USA and Australia it certainly feels like and is labelled 'global collaboration' when students connect across the country. Regardless of where participants are, connecting and collaborating beyond the immediate learning environment is the goal - and it generally takes the same tools, habits, and attitudes to connect locally as it does to connect more globally. Two types of communication methods are needed to sustain online global collaboration activities, such as a global project: synchronous and asynchronous. The traditional classroom is separated by location and separated by time. The globally collaborative classroom is unified by the internet and unified by asynchronous communication tools.

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Synchronous, meaning in real time, refers to activities like video conferencing, such as a Skype call, virtual classroom interaction and virtual excursion. The criteria here is for participants to be connecting with external partners or collaborators at the same time. A Skype call or similar activity where participants are in the same virtual space at the same time and can see and hear each other provides an engaging experience and opportunity for intercultural exchange and immediate enhanced learning. Communication can be verbal as well as text-based, and real-time presentations are possible afforded by the virtual platform. Student Summits where classes share their learning during or at the end of a global project, or in-person global debates where debate teams come together for a formal, online debate are typical examples. Also typical, although perhaps not as well recognised or implemented, is virtual interaction in real time. This applies to participants using the same tool at the same time to share ideas, collaborate and possibly co-create something new together. Replicable examples here include collaborating via a Google doc or Google slide presentation to brainstorm, create, or share in real time. Also, attending what is called a 'tweet chat' uses the Twitter platform over a designated period of time and the allocation of a particular hashtag, e.g. #SLAVconf, to connect and share. The practice of tweet chats has become a unique form of professional learning for educators, with chats hosted by organisations and individual thought leaders whereby a series of questions is asked over a period

of time (usually one hour) with an invitation to a global audience to respond and interact. This practice also works well in the classroom if well organised and managed.

Asynchronous, meaning not in real time, refers to activities such as online discussion forums, blogging, and sharing through multimedia platforms. There are many varied tools and platforms that support asynchronous global interactions and collaborations, most of which are external to a typical school's learning management system. As with synchronous 'beyond the classroom' learning planning and management of tools in terms of purpose, access, and best practice use of is critical to successful learning outcomes. Best examples here include the use of platforms such as Edmodo and Padlet to foster online interaction between global groups and teams. Edmodo effectively supports discussion forum interaction and sharing of media, while Padlet has a range of uses supported by options for text, audio and video responses. Each of these, as with other asynchronous platforms, can be managed for different levels of access and privacy. Once again, planning ahead and designing the online experience is a crucial part of online global collaborative learning.

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The imperative of collaborating globally: Moving from local to global learning modes

Online collaborative learning is important for providing global community development that supports interpersonal exchange, information collection and analysis and problem solving. Community building is a social activity and therefore a design challenge when creating online spaces to learn. However, 'build it and they will come' is not a guarantee, and according to researcher and educator, Riel (1996), online learning communities of practice require three elements: 1) balance between unity of work and balance of experiences; 2) observance that size of group relates to the purpose; and, 3) reflection and evaluation of work.

Other positive outcomes of online collaborative learning include digital literacy, critical thinking and real world exposure to authentic audiences. Connecting and learning globally means you don't just read about people but deal with people. Utilising appropriate tools (usually Web 2.0, some of which are discussed above) allows learners to go to the source and have a real conversation: when students study about the world it's somewhere else – but when they learn with the world the diversity of thought and learning no longer depends on physical space. Global project applications, through the use of a wiki and other platforms to a measurable extent, helped impede student ethnocentrism and promote positive working relationships in the K-12 globally collaborative classroom (Union & Green, 2013). Simple global interactions such as iEARN Learning Circles (**http://www.globallearningcircles.org/**) encourage and build empathy through student outcomes of deeper understanding of issues from multiple perspectives and awareness of global issues (Riel, 1994).

Ettienne Wenger (1998), educational theorist in communities of practice proffers one principle for developing global communities is to open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives. While Anne Mirtschin, global collaborative Australian educator, revealed, "I think when we collaborate globally we learn just as much about those other people as we do about ourselves and I think our own personal sense of being an Australian etc. is terribly important as well." Through global community building and opportunities to learn with others across borders learners become the best textbook for each other.

Looking to the future

Work in the future will be via platforms, projects, gigs, and freelancing requiring skills that are flexible, utilise new cloud-based technologies in local and global contexts (Boudreau, 2016). The Committee for Economic Development Australia report identifies a lack of insight into the critical skills required for the current and future workforce stating that ICT ubiquity in the future means digital literacy must be a basic competency for children, and workers of the future will have deeper computer literacy (CEDA, 2015). Increased global interconnectivity plus diversity and adaptability are identified by the Institute for the Future as 'drivers' or disruptive shifts that will reshape the workforce landscape, with key skills including cross-cultural competency and virtual collaboration (Davies, Fidler & Gorbis, 2011).

Design, implementation and management of online global collaboration

A dearth of online global collaborative learning in the K-12 classroom may be a result of educator inability to design, implement and also manage effective learning that is beyond the classroom. It is a common narrative for educators to attempt global collaborative learning with unsuccessful outcomes due to lack of skills and experience in this space.

Features of successful online global collaboration include:

- Themes and topics relevant to the curriculum
- Reliable and frequent communication between participants
- Strong project or global interaction design and organisation designed with clear and agreed upon guidelines
- Learners learn with others and develop intercultural understanding
- New meaning is co-created with partners

Globally collaborative educators find like-minded colleagues to form online partnerships to learn from each other and design new learning experiences together. Alternatively, they find existing global projects such as Flat Connections (**http://flatconnections.com**), or the Global Read Aloud (**https://theglobalreadaloud.com/**), or global interactions such as PenPal Schools (**https://www.penpalschools.com/**) that are already designed and managed to support classroom connections.

Taxonomy of global connection

The Taxonomy of Global Connection (Lindsay & Davis, 2012) aims to classify global connections and in particular online global collaborative learning objectives into a series of experiences and priorities from within the immediate classroom to various options beyond the classroom. It implies that effective online global collaboration relies on being able to sustain connections beyond the virtual, synchronous experience; that asynchronous networks and online communities support collaboration; and that global connection management is needed. It also refers to the changeover or shift from teacher-managed to student-managed learning.

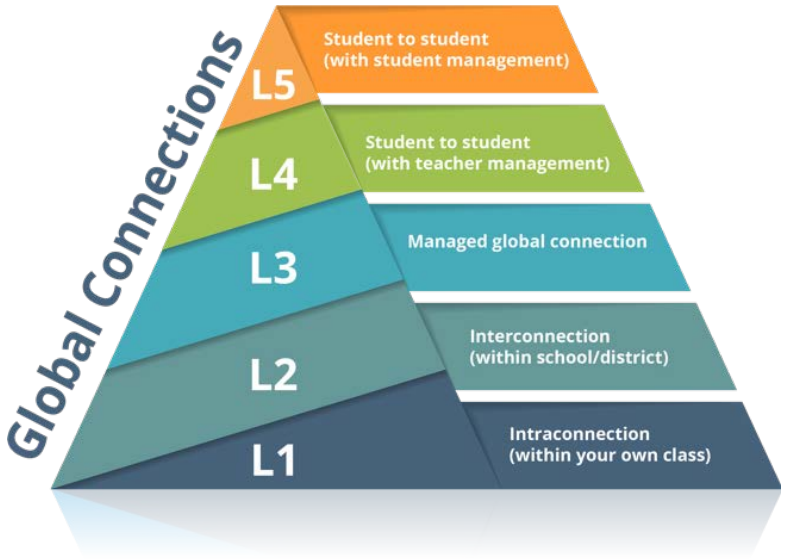

Figure 1. The Taxonomy of Global Connection (Lindsay & Davis, 2012)

Level 1: Intraconnection applies when connection, communication and collaboration occur within a defined learning environment such as a classroom (real and/or virtual). There is typically one teacher and a set of students.

Level 2: Interconnection applies when learners connect beyond the 'inner circle' of Level 1. Interconnection takes place when a class connects with another class for the purpose of sharing ideas, intercultural understanding, problem solving and other collaborative activities.

Level 3: Managed Global Connection applies when collaborative learning, typically a global project, takes place that is designed and managed by educators. Connection is established between classrooms located anywhere through carefully chosen online tools, structured project-based learning design, and mutually agreed outcomes.

Level 4: Student-to-student with teacher management applies when students are given responsibility to initiate vital connections, maintain communication, and develop collaborative learning modes beyond the classroom. This is done under the direction and support of the teacher.

Level 5: Student-to-student with student management is likely the most connected or 'flat' style of online global collaboration where students take on leadership roles and manage learning across

classrooms and groups. Students should be independently able to access all online researches to complete the global collaboration in an autonomous learning environment.

Design for action

Successful online global collaboration requires some structure and planning. Both simple real time connections, such as a Skype call with a partner classroom, and elongated projects that sustain for six or more weeks require considerable planning around participant engagement and expected outcomes. The protocols for successful online globally collaborative learning can be summarised simply in the 'design for action' approach:

- **Find** like-minded educators
- **Design curriculum and outcomes**
- **Select tools that all participants can access**
- **Manage the collaboration** for success

This 'mantra' has supported numerous educators to forge ahead with ideas for collaborations, motivated to approach online global collaboration systematically.

Global standards enable collaborative learning in K-12

As teachers, education leaders and students themselves are embedding collaborative practice into the curriculum within and beyond the classroom it is imperative we understand essential influences and motivations. For example, the International Society for Education (ISTE) refreshed student standards include the new standard 'Global Collaborator' whereby, *"Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.*" The refreshed educator standards include 'Collaborator' whereby *"Educators dedicate time to collaborate with both colleagues and students to improve practice, discover and share resources and ideas, and solve problems."*

New concepts and pedagogies to support online global collaborative learning

Pedagogical capacity, an educator's repertoire of teaching strategies and partnerships for learning, has and will continue to change as technology becomes more pervasive to include content delivery and consumption as well as collaboration and creation of new knowledge and a focus on the process of learning (Fullan et al., 2014). Pedagogical change refers to how educational goals may change due to a paradigm shift to constructivist teaching modes for online globally connected and collaborative learning. The research of John Hattie shares new pedagogies where the educator has a new role as 'activator', including educator-student relationship, reciprocal teaching, and feedback (Fullan et al., 2014). In line with this perspective, the role of the student must change to

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The educator as online global collaborative pedagogue

One of the challenges in the K-12 classroom is the lack of clearly identified emerging pedagogical approaches in relation to online global collaborative learning through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) that provide opportunity to connect and learn with others online. The Australian curriculum promotes ICT capability in conjunction with intercultural understanding, however the links between these are not always visible within a schools' curriculum focus.

In order to implement effective online global collaborative learning in the classroom educator enabling personal pedagogies include:

- Disposition to online learning: Flexible online interaction, collaboration and co-creation
- Approach to professional learning: Participatory, flexible, self-organised, collaborative learning relationships through global networks
- Conceptual change: Open and innovative online global collaborative learning through agile curriculum approaches

The Global Collaborator Mindset

Research into online global collaborative educators has revealed that not only do they develop a certain skills set, they also adopt a mindset conducive to connecting and collaborating beyond the immediate physical classroom. Typically, a mindset, referring to a person's mental outlook or set of attitudes, and also referring to a belief or disposition, is the enabler or the barrier to new ideas and practices. Psychologist Carol Dweck introduced the concept of mindsets as a set of personal beliefs related to qualities such as intelligence, talents, and personality (**https://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/themindsets/index.html**) and contrasts what she calls 'fixed mindset' with 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2006). A person with a fixed mindset believes their basic qualities are fixed traits and that talent alone creates success. In contrast, a person with a growth mindset believes abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work.

The Global Collaborator Mindset (GCM) is a conceptually new way of framing dispositions and behaviours to explain why educators are willing and able to implement online global collaborative learning as part of their professional practice. It challenges the belief that technology integration and access to online networks automatically means educators are naturally global and collaborative.

Key attributes of the GCM are connection, openness, autonomy and innovation. Collectively these represent a foundational structure instrumental to online global collaboration.

Connection

A connected educator is digitally fluent, curious, and empathetic and searches beyond the immediate classroom and school to build a personal identity and forge relationships with like-minded colleagues, experts, and others in the search for new understandings and learning experiences.

An educator who is connected is digitally fluent and empathetic with others beyond the immediate classroom and:

- Designs and manages an online presence
- Connects within and beyond to develop a PLN and join virtual PLCs
- Applies synchronous and asynchronous communication and learning modes
- Negotiates connections with others for collaborative partnerships
- Fosters this mindset in their students and adopt a pedagogical approach whereby learning that is not 'connected' to the outside world feels stifled and disconnected.

Openness

An open educator is willing and able to practice 'openness' and contribute transparently, has a belief in the value of open educational practice and ways of knowing that lead to collaboration and co-creation of knowledge in a connected ('flattened') learning environment.

An educator who is open:

- Leverages digital technologies to create, co-create and share online
- Believes education is not just about content knowledge
- Adopts a beyond the textbook attitude that learning can take place anywhere, anytime, with and from others
- 'Flattens' the learning
- Integrates new pedagogical approaches - open practice and ways of knowing

Autonomy

An autonomous educator self-regulates actions based on personal values, preferences and beliefs. Autonomy provides the freedom to employ collaborative individualism and act independently with self-determination, resilience, flexibility and agility.

An educator who is autonomous:

- Assumes pedagogical independence, curriculum agility and digital freedom
- Is a resilient leader, flexible, and promotes self-determination of students

Innovation

> An innovative educator is a trailblazer in global collaboration and regularly envisions, designs, originates, creates and initiates new learning pathways; cultivates and expects a growth mindset; adopts new thinking and social skills; and fosters new cultures for learning inclusively.

An educator who is innovative

- Implements online global collaboration as the new normal
- Designs learning for online collaborative modes
- Cultivates growth mindsets and global citizenship and competency
- Understands the sociability of online learning and new relationships for learning
- Fosters new cultures for learning - focus on processes, not outcomes

Removing this barrier of 'attitude' the phenomenon of online global collaboration then becomes the catalyst for disruptive approaches and new pedagogies.

Figure 2. The Global Collaborator Mindset (Lindsay, 2019)

Conclusion: A vision for the future

As Friedman (2007) stated, "If you're not doing it, it's not happening." Educators are encouraged to 'think out of the box' more and work towards adopting the Global Collaborator Mindset as a pathway into new pedagogical applications for online global collaborative learning. The role of the library and the teacher librarian is crucial to

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this vision for future learning in schools. The library, as the hub of the school, has potential to be the global collaborative hub, with resources, understanding, knowledge, skills and above all the mindset to influence and support learners.

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