GLOBAL EDUCATION CONNECTIONS AND STRATEGIES: DO THESE CONNECT, SHARE OR SEPARATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS?

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Abstract

Global education seems to appear on the horizon as more and more businesses from various locations sought to expand and to better develop their human capital through technological, economic, and business/management advancements. However, as more technology was introduced into the domestic and global arenas – both the areas of business and education realized a need for change. However, who are the true change agents in this transition or renaissance of global education in today's marketplace, as well as the individual workplace. This paper will examine how the impact of online learning has addressed the field of global education and incorporate it into its various curricula in order to better prepare learners both in the areas of domestic and global educational practices, strategies, and connections. We are no longer insulated from other regional or global areas, even if the current leaders of one’s nation may attempt to limit our reach, but rather as educational change agents we are now empowered to be the “Good Shepherds of the Global Educational Movement (GEM)” and make changes that will impact both our current and future learners. However, the greater questions underlying this research is how can such online technology, teaching methodologies, and preparation of online educators make a notable change and help to motivate, empower, and evaluate such impact and change? Through the use of the Barrett (2013) Virtual Change Learning Model (VCLM), consists of three parts: 1) relevance; 2) reality, and 3) re-use. This model helped to accomplish a more “needed” change to the learning process for adult learners in order to help learners see relevance in learning, visualize or experience some aspect of reality or relationship of the given topic/concepts, as well as how they can re-use or later apply their learning. However, one more dimension has been added to the VCLM, namely, the fourth part has been named “re-evaluation” in terms of a final checks-and-balances, as well as a form of self-evaluation for the learner as well. While no single model or theory may encompass all factors of a learning environment, this particular application will be used to explore and examine how virtual learning programs are making changes to their curricula in order to embrace more of a “global lens”, as well as helping to keep their educational capital on target and continuously improving in this area in terms of “watching out for their educational capital” and keep their learning opportunities relevant, real, useful, and reflective for all stakeholders involved.

Keywords: Global education, online learning, VCLM, change agent.

1 INTRODUCTION

Education has evolved over the centuries, and with the onset of many major technological changes in both equipment and applications, the role and function for both the instructional staff and learners has equally changed. However, the one constant in light of all of the many changes is the need to learn different ways of learning and teaching in the realm of academia, as well as the workplace. In particular, the way business is conducted both domestically and globally has changed as well – and distance is no long the bigger issue with the use of various technological devices, as well as the introduction and implementation of various types of hardware and software in all types of environment.

Global education seems to appear on the horizon as more and more businesses from various locations sought to expand and to better develop their human capital through technological, economic, and business/management advancements. However, as more technology was introduced into the domestic and global arenas – both the areas of business and education realized a need for change. According to Newsweek, “the best universities in the world are adopting a global perspective to best prepare their students for the global business stage.” [1] Juxtaposed to this approach, there are still many schools working with the older Socratic method of teaching and having students learn from reading and basic research writing to a given assignment, which many not be as dynamically structured and lacking in real world context in order draw in the student to energize and motivate them...
to become more interested in global issues, challenges, and real world preparation. Thus, one intent of such a paper as this is to help attract and motivate the reader’s interest to realize that all educators have an obligation stronger today than ever before to help open up more doors of learning, whether in the physical or virtual classroom, and to share all possible technological tools and potential learning applications to help them learn and grow in this area of global discovery. Further, educators and academic institutions may all have a shared or varied definition of what they consider to be global education, but the following perspective is a good stepping stone for the purpose of this paper to understand it from a contextual framework. According to the publication Global Perspectives, they define global education as:

Global education emphasizes [sic] the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, as well as building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places. Global education promotes positive values and assists students to take responsibility for their actions and to see themselves as global citizens who can contribute to a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. [2]

Considering this definition above on global education, the question is how do educators address each of these areas, but what type of learning strategies and techniques can they employ for effective learning and the obtainment of their learning objectives for their courses. Thus, this could be extended a little further with the understanding of what others may consider as important in understanding the role and function of global education, also known as international education, in the context of how such education can benefit not only the learner, learning environment, society, as well as the global community. The Center for Global Education’s mission statement outlines the role and function as

The Center for Global Education promotes international education to foster cross-cultural awareness, cooperation and understanding. Living and working effectively in a global society requires learning with an international perspective. We promote this type of learning by collaborating with colleges, universities and other organizations around the world. [3]

Such collaboration is important among academicians and learners, and this type of collaboration is gained by joint research efforts, interaction and presentation in international conferences, and virtual/online sharing and joint learning efforts. However, this requires a need for change in the current mindsets in some academic and global communities, and the need for perhaps a “Community of Practice” as described Wenger-Trayner. The author wrote that “Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope.” [4][5] Such communities can offer a change of global collaboration, as well as domestic exchange, but also it starts with an understanding of the common bond – the need for further exchange of learning strategies, techniques, and understanding of what is global education and how can such emphasis can help to broaden academic exchanges, research, and the drive for better global interaction and collaboration.

On another note, who are these true change agents in this transition or renaissance of global education in today’s marketplace, as well as the individual workplace? This paper will examine how the impact of online learning has addressed the field of global education and incorporate it into its various curricula in order to better prepare learners both in the areas of domestic and global educational practices, strategies, and connections.

According to Fullan, this kind of change means teachers must flip their traditional role on its head. “The main role of the leader is to inspire others to work together to get results,” notes Fullan. And with technology so well developed and ever-present in the life of students, these role changes are a being forced, to a degree. “The teacher is change agent. The student is the knowledge worker,” says Fullan.

“The developmental role now is helping students to become self-learners. With the teacher not playing a passive role, but a very active change-agent role.” [6]

Thus, global education is a key focus for many academic communities and not just narrowly focused on the business and management disciplines, but many other disciplines. Thus, one area of discovery in a learning environment in this topic area would be the need for change agents, both in learning and
teaching. According to Couros, he noted that the five characteristics of a change agent are: 1) Clear Vision; 2) Patient yet persistent; 3) Asks tough questions; 4) Knowledgeable and leads by example; and 5) Strong relationships built on trust. With these five characteristics in mind, the educator and course designer can construct and develop courses with different areas of inquiry, research aims/objectives, as well as prepare learners for future changes in their own communities and global futures. We are no longer insulated from other regional or global areas, even if the current leaders of one’s nation may attempt to limit our reach, but rather as educational change agents we are now empowered to be the “Good Shepherds of the Global Educational Movement (GEM)” and make changes that will impact both our current and future learners. However, the greater questions underlying this research is how can such online technology, teaching methodologies, and preparation of online educators make a notable change and help to motivate, empower, and evaluate such impact and change? In particular, this leads to understanding how some academic leaders and educators are changing the direction of education is in the incorporate of more focus on the global community and future of educating learners in the area of global happenings, issues, challenges, and creating solutions for future problem areas. The next section of this paper will focus on the methodology used in one virtual university in the area of changing some of its learning activities to accommodate such needed changes in global educations, as well as to incorporate various types of learning approaches with the help of technology to enhance the learning experience. More importantly, it will provide a context background to understand the elements of the Virtual Change Learning Model (VCLM). [7]

2 METHODOLOGY

While many educational institutions have been either progressive or hesitant with technology and the changing learning environment, there has been an ongoing online move to change from the traditional learning environment over to a virtual learning platform known as online learning. However, for those academics who have not fully embraced the change over from one environment to a more modern one, they have embraced the hybrid or blended learning approach as a “go-between” strategy. In this paper, we will explore how several academics and educational institutions have go beyond the traditional strategy of examining and implementing change, but rather this paper will overview steps leading up to the creation and implementation of best practices and strategies in connecting learning content, technology, and virtual interaction between the learning and instructor as a facilitator. The following section will over the key learning model used in motivating the students through this given project and helping to reinforce their learning.

2.1 Virtual Change Learning Model (VCLM)

Barrett outlined a new type of learning model to examine potential virtual changes in the learning process, specifically in terms of how learning is shared, examined, and applied to the learning environment for adult learners.[8] Basically, this 3-part learning model was created to examine and determine if given learning objectives used for adult learners seeking additional education and/or training were interested in more lifelong learning opportunities. In essence, the underlying question was whether another type of model might be beneficial in motivating students to think beyond their current academic studies and see the relevance of such studies for their current working requirements and future professional endeavors. After several years of working with other models, which were constructed for traditional learners in the “classical” traditional learning environment (physical location), the researcher realized there was a greater need to think “outside of the box” and consider what these new types of adult learners, especially virtual/online learners, need in order to help them to move from point a to be in their academic and professional lives.

Further, this new model, known as the Virtual Change Learning Model (VCLM), is comprised of three parts: 1) relevance; 2) reality, and 3) re-use. In particular, this model helps to provide a different way to look at potential change in the learning process for adult learners. One of the aims of the use of this model is to try to understand how these three parts can be applied to learning, specifically in the online learning environment. Also, the use of this model help educators, as well as learners, to see the relevance in learning, visualize or experience some aspect of reality or relationships which can be connected with given topic/concepts, as well as how they can be re-used or later applied their learning. Historically, based on Bloom’s Taxonomy approach, rather than center on the old method of recall, learners are introduced with this use of the VCLM approach to learning. However, if these learners can see connections in terms of the potential use in their person and professional lives, there may be a great probability that they will want to become more participatory in their learning, as well as self-learning opportunities. Therefore, the possible outcome of using this model in a teaching
approach and strategy creation, as well as designing and developing online courses, this could help to engage more learners, open up more areas for research and learning inquiry, and consider other technological possibilities for educational exploration in their lifelong endeavors. [8] As noted previously, the Barrett (2013) Virtual Change Learning Model (VCLM), consists of three parts: 1) relevance; 2) reality, and 3) re-use.

This model can help to provide potential changes in the learning process for adult learners in order to help learners see relevance in learning, visualize or experience some aspect of reality or relationship of the given topic/concepts, as well as how they can re-use or later apply their learning. However, one more dimension has been added to the VCLM, namely, the fourth part has been named “re-evaluation” in terms of a final checks-and-balances, as well as a form of self-evaluation for the learner as well. While no single model or theory may encompass all factors of a learning environment, this particular application will be used to explore and examine how virtual learning programs are making changes to their curricula in order to embrace more of a “global lens”, as well as helping to keep their educational capital on target and continuously improving in this area in terms of “watching out for their educational capital” and keep their learning opportunities relevant, real, useful, and reflective for all stakeholders involved. The next section will overview the student population observed over a 5-year period, as well as provide an overview of the 4-part project used in this course design to provide contextual background of the learning being provide, and how the use of such a portfolio project can be beneficial for the students in terms of current and future learning needs.

2.2 Student Population and Course Design

One of the core course requirements for the Masters of Business Administration program of study is a course in Global Management Strategies. This course provides an overview of global business and managerial practices, as well as provides a unique opportunity for students to apply course content knowledge in a practice 4-part portfolio project. Portfolios have been used in many different learning environments, but with the onset of many different technological applications, the use of electronic portfolios, otherwise known as e-Portfolios, have made a bigger entry into online courses than previously anticipated. The Pennsylvania State University notes that:

E-portfolios are an electronic version of the traditional portfolio that was a collection of items on paper, created by a person to represent his or her learning progress or best work. E-portfolios are digital collections that are typically available through the Internet with access anytime and anywhere. E-portfolios can be used with students as both learning and assessment tools. They can be created and used by either individual students to show personal growth or groups of students for team projects and peer learning. [9][10]

During the initial week, the student works with the instructor in selecting a company with several global locations in order to conduct secondary research to discover various answers to current global business practices, laws, regulations, policies, modes of operation, management practices and more. Each student has a 3-part weekly assignment with a series of questions to research for the approved company and its associated global locations, which will then be analyzed and edited into a final portfolio project. This particular assignment has been part of this course for the past 5 years, and it has proven to be a good global business application for students in terms of research, analytical and logical thinking, data analysis, and overall understanding of global, as well as domestic, business and management practices. The use of technology in terms of research, data preparation, as well as editing a final compilation of all parts of the previous 3-part assignment into the final portfolio represents a good use of both technology and time/project management for all MBA students. During the preparation of the 4-part portfolio, students prepare each part and submit it for review and grade by the instructor. The instructor will review the weekly parts of this project, along with the use of a specific rubric instrument. Students are given feedback in terms of proofing, researching, writing and APA style/formatting to help prepare for future courses in their program of study. For many MBA students, this is their initial course, so it is critical for this first-course instructor to be more attentive to all students during this initial course undertaking. Upon completion of their part of the assignment, the instructor will quickly turnaround this final preliminary writing and research portion for the student to start creating their portfolio project. The student can present their final portfolio in either one of two given formats. First, the student can prepare a formal narrative formatted paper in APA style to turn into the instructor for review. On the other hand, the student can prepare a webpage (which can be used as another technological learning tool) to include each part of the 4-part project, include the final portfolio. In the following results section, further discussion will be held on this later submission type.
3 RESULTS

After a review of the observations of academic interaction, learning and growth, as well as the interaction of students in connection between content knowledge and application of global issues, challenges, and situations in the fields of business and management, it appears for yet another learning strategy – group dynamics and organization/discovery. The move from the individual's academic endeavors on selecting a company and research it may be more of a vacuum approach and may need to be nurtured further with a group setting, or better known as virtual groups in the online learning context. This new type of virtual learning presents several advantages such as enhancing one’s group dynamics and organizational skills, as well as learning new skills in terms of virtual project management skills, as well as embracing better virtual time management skills to understand what might be entailed if the student were to change over from a traditional office setting to one of a virtual plain working environment. Consequently, this opens up another area of research for the researcher and others interested in online learning and global education, as well as how group learning in a virtual environment may have an impact not only on the learning process for all stakeholders, but also provide yet another area of inquiry and discovery. With the onset of newer technology each year and a variety of software enhancements, along with the ever-growing arena of the Internet and Social Media, educators and learners have even a bigger advantage over their predecessors of decades past. In fact, now is the time for more educators to seize the technological wave and utilize it to enhance teaching methods, strategies, and techniques. In fact, one enhancement used in both undergraduate and graduate courses is a web page learning activity. The students are asked to create a webpage of their own with given software available for free on the Internet. This provides the learner with an opportunity to create their first webpage and attached different assignments of their course to it for both academic credits, as well as for latter use as an electronic portfolio, as previously called in this paper as an e-Portfolio. The students are encouraged to continue to add to their personal webpage after the course with assignments of future courses to build their own personal portfolio to use for future job interviews. It should be noted that a number of students have downloaded their webpage to a USB and taken this along with them to job interviews and have landed jobs when they had an actual portfolio of their work to share with inquiring interviewers. Consequently, the outcome of the overall observations, review of assignments, and final review of the students portfolios for this one particular course over a 5-year period has proven that it provides a unique learning experience for all students to learn more about their selected companies and their interaction with personnel, laws, and regulations in overseas locations, which helps to expand the global education of all students. Further, this research has also shown that there is a need for a future update to the course to include more technological presentation software and perhaps have students to start preparing final portfolios with not only written narrative assignments, but also, the incorporation of a potential Ted Talk or YouTube presentation to share their findings and overall research with the class, which could also be incorporated as another segment of their webpage for academic credit and future professional endeavors. The final segment of this paper will offer a summary of the conclusions and potential future research changes which could be beneficial for both the educator and learner.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Global education should not be just a series of presented concepts, theories, and principles of how business is conducted and managerial practices are created and formed. The actual “active learning” for students to discover various facets and challenging issues and situation presented in the global arena are critical now, more than ever before, especially with the given new technology and application tools that can help improve upon the education of today’s learners, as well as those of tomorrow. As emphasized earlier in this paper, global education seems to appear on the horizon as more and more businesses from various locations sought to expand and to better develop their human capital through technological, economic, and business/management advancements. However, as more technology has been introduced into the domestic and global arenas – both of these areas, which include the fields of business and education need to realize that changes need to be made. However, who are the true change agents in this transition or renaissance of global education in today’s marketplace, as well as the individual workplace – is it the administrators, educators or adult learners? Or should it be a combination of all of these stakeholders in order to gain a more meaningful “buy in” and collaborative effort for such a change? Consequently, the key for change in terms of technology and the ever-changing work and career requirements, as well as marketplace demands, lies in the connection between the user and technology in terms of the methodology and strategies are used for instruction and applying the new content knowledge and real-world application.
Further research is needed in this area to focus more on educator’s teaching effectiveness in relating material to the learner and help them to see connect between challenges, issues, and situations which affect not only domestic, but also global business and operations. Thus, this opens up yet another area for further discovery.

REFERENCES


