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ISSUES BRIEF

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GLOBAL COMPETENCE

In the 21st century, the world has been rapidly changed by economic, political, technological, and social forces. Globalization is a word commonly used today as our world becomes increasingly interconnected. The elimination of various trade barriers and technological advancements bring economies together from across vast oceans, and the U.S. economy is increasingly challenged by what were once considered developing nations. Political change and human migration have altered the demographic fabric of many of our local communities. As one globalization theorist correctly posits, “our lives are becoming increasingly intertwined with those of distant people and places around the world - economically, politically, and culturally. These links are not always new, but they are more pervasive than ever before” (Legrain).

The increasingly apparent fact is that our education system is not preparing young people for this new reality (Longview Foundation). Education reform movements in the 80’s and 90’s stressed standards and accountability in schools, particularly with regard to subjects such as reading, science, and mathematics. Now, however, globalization creates a new demand upon our students. They must not only be competent in the basic subjects, but they must also have a grasp of foreign languages and a deeper understanding of other countries and cultures. Education must be harmonized with global realities if students are to exist successfully in our new world, a world where different countries, cultures, and individuals will be forced to interact on a regular basis. The Committee for Economic Development recognizes these challenges in their report “Education for Global Leadership,” saying:

Despite America’s status as an economic, military, and cultural superpower, we risk becoming narrowly confined within our own borders, lacking the understanding of the world around us that is essential to our continued leadership role in the world community. The day has long passed when a citizen could afford to be uninformed about the rest of the world and America’s place in that world. (Committee for Economic Development)

This issue brief will address global competence, why it is necessary in American education, and the ways in which we are falling behind in providing global education for our students. Consequently, this brief will also address methods and available resources for researching global competence and integrating international education into the classroom.

WHAT IS GLOBAL COMPETENCE?

The question of what young people must learn to be successful in an increasingly interdependent world will be met with many different answers. However, there are congruencies that arise in multiple theories. The term “global competence” is often used to describe a body of knowledge, along with the skills and attitudes necessary to live and work effectively in the new global environment.

Harvard University education professor Fernando Reimers alludes to three specific dimensions of global competence in his report “Educating for Global Competency.” He says:

I define Global Competency as the knowledge and skills that help people understand the flat world in which they live, the skills to integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events and to create possibilities to address them. Global competencies are also the attitudinal and ethical dispositions that make it possible to interact peacefully, respectfully and productively with fellow human beings from diverse geographies. (Reimers)

The three dimensions that he mentions here fit within the categories of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. First, Reimers’s position is that the student must develop a “deep knowledge and understanding of world history, geography, the global dimensions of topics such as health, climate, and economics and of the process of globalization itself.” This is specifically the academic aspect of global competence. The second dimension of global competence he mentions, skills, refers to the ability to speak, understand, and think in languages other than one’s own native language (Reimers). Reimers’s third dimension of global competence involves developing the appropriate attitudes to

exist in the global community. This could also be referred to as the ethical dimension. This aspect involves the development of a “positive disposition” toward cultural differences. It is, in essence, a framework of global values that requires a sense of identity, as well as empathy for others with different identities. This dimension is particularly important, because it promotes interaction on the basis of equality, mutual understanding, and respect. The disposition to act to uphold basic human rights is necessary to prevent potentially exploitive relationships between cultures.

The American Council on Education presents a very similar definition within their list of global competencies necessary for college and university students. There are three categories under which all competencies are organized. Again, these are knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The central competency listed in the category of knowledge is “knowledge of global issues, processes, trends, and systems (that is, economic and political interdependency among nations, environmental-cultural interaction, global governance bodies, and nongovernmental organizations)” (American Council on Education). Much like Reimers’s definition, this alludes to an understanding of the global aspect of issues, such as economics and the environment. However, this definition goes further to include an understanding of “the beliefs, values, perspectives, practices, and products” of other cultures (American Council on Education).

The skills dimension also goes a step further than Reimers’s definition. Beyond the ability to simply use a foreign language, it includes the application of cultural knowledge and critical communication skills to genuinely “connect” with people in other language communities and learn from them. This definition places equal importance on the acquisition and application of knowledge. We see this again in the attitudes category, which includes a student’s willingness “to seek out international or intercultural opportunities” (American Council on Education). It also speaks more specifically about the particular aspects of a “positive disposition” towards other cultures, including an appreciation of their art, language, religion, and philosophy. Overall, this definition is decidedly more proactive on the part of the learner, and it implies that the student should actively seek out intercultural experience.

Reimers approaches global competence from a particularly academic standpoint. The American Council on Education is focused on including an aspect of human interaction on all levels of global competence. The Committee for Economic Development however, defines global competency based on the most basic necessities for the U.S. population to remain competitive in the age of globalization.

The Committee makes a number of recommendations, the first being an “internationalization” of American education. This refers to teaching international content across the curriculum in order to expend American student’s knowledge of other countries and cultures (Committee for Economic Development). This fits within the category of knowledge that is seen across definitions of global competency. Their second recommendation involves increasing the fluency of American students in foreign languages, especially those critical but less-taught languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Farsi, and Turkish (Committee for Economic Development). This is among the skills aspect of global competency. Finally, to address the attitudes of the American population, the Committee makes very practical

recommendations. They state that increasing global competency requires political leaders, business leaders, philanthropic organizations, and the media to inform the public about the importance of education in foreign languages and cultures (Committee for Economic Development). This is needed to create the most basic positive disposition toward foreign studies.

Though these three definitions have several differences, one framework for understanding global competence can be extracted. This framework contains three specific areas of competence. The first is knowledge, which includes being informed about global history, global geography, global issues, and foreign cultures. The second area, skills, is the ability to effectively use a foreign language for practical communication with other cultures. Finally, attitudes, refers to possessing a positive disposition toward other cultures, a sense of empathy, and global values that include equality and mutual respect. What is also similar among all definitions of global competency is that just possessing one of these aspects is not enough. They are all interconnected, and necessary for being able to fully understand and interact effectively with foreign cultures in the global community.

WHY GLOBAL COMPETENCE IS NECESSARY

Almost half a century ago, Canadian media theorist and communication professor Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” as a representation of his theory that as a result of “electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned” (McLuhan). Essentially, technology allows people from across the world to share experiences in real time, much like in a small village. Today, the Internet reaches more than 20 percent of the world population, allowing people to interact from all over the globe. Mobile telephones are used by two billion people, and are one of the biggest markets of growth in developing nations. Television exists in ninety percent of households in the world, with news and other programs running 24 hours a day (Zhao).

These technologies extend beyond communication as well. Advancements in transportation technology enable the physical movement of people, goods, and services across national and continental borders with greater ease than ever before. The result is a world that has become increasingly interdependent, with very different people and cultures being exposed to one another on a daily basis. The rules for existing in this new world have changed. It requires a level of intercultural communication and understanding that was never necessary before, and this extends to all arenas of life. Our economy is now connected on a global scale, our national security is affected by events that occur far outside our borders, and the demographics of our local communities become more diverse every day. Existing in this globally connected world requires globally competent citizens.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

According to the Committee for Economic Development, globalization is “driving the demand for a U.S. workforce that possesses knowledge of other countries and cultures and is competent in languages other than English” (Committee for Economic Development). Today, one in five U.S. manufacturing jobs is tied to exports, and most of the estimated

growth potential for U.S. businesses lies in overseas markets (U.S. Census Bureau, “Exports from Manufacturing...”). As interaction with foreign consumers increases, U.S. companies will be required to understand the minds and preferences of people and cultures very different from our own. Already, many U.S. multinational corporations make most of their profits overseas. Over seventy percent of Coca-Cola’s profits come from outside the United States (Committee for Economic Development). This kind of operation is impossible to maintain without an understanding of local markets across the globe. The demand for globally competent employees will only rise. In a 2002 survey, about 40 percent of U.S. companies reported that their international sales were growing more rapidly than domestic sales, and more than 60 percent said that over the next decade they expected the proportion of their sales revenue from other countries to increase (Kedia).

Technological advances in fiber-optic telecommunications and computer software are enabling companies in less-developed countries to compete with U.S. businesses via the Internet and other previously unavailable technological infrastructures. Trade has shifted as a result, with emerging markets such as China and India taking the lead. The United States annual trade with Asia is over \$800 billion, which has surpassed our trade rates with Europe and other Western nations. A large reason for this is that countries like China and India have switched from being low-wage/low-tech to being low-wage/high-tech countries. China more than doubled their electronics, machinery, and transport equipment exports between 1994 and 2003, from 18.1 to 42.9 percent of exports. Most of these end up in the U.S., and our global trade balance in advanced technology products has shifted into the negatives (Scott).

The lower wages and improved technology in many emerging economies have led many manufacturing companies to “fragment” their operations and send their production plants overseas. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke commented on this practice of outsourcing, observing that:

The production processes are becoming geographically fragmented to an unprecedented degree. Rather than producing goods in a single process in a single location, firms are increasingly breaking the production process into discrete steps and performing each step in whatever location allows them to minimize costs. For example, the U.S. chip producer AMD locates most of its research and development in California; produces in Texas, Germany, and Japan; does final processing and testing in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and China; and then sells to markets around the globe. (Bernanke)

Multinational corporations like this employed approximately 21.8 million workers in the United States in 2003 (U.S. Department of Commerce). The challenges these corporations face are often too complicated for a single local team to solve. Instead, multicultural, global teams must work together to reach a solution. Thanks to the efficiency of communication, these teams are able to work on projects together for extended periods of time, solving problems across borders and time zones. Success of multicultural, multinational teams is becoming essential to success in the global

marketplace (Committee for Economic Development). If individuals do not possess the aptitudes and competencies to participate in this type of team, they will lose out on a job, and U.S. businesses will lose out on money. American companies lose an estimated \$2 billion a year due to inadequate cross-cultural guidance for their employees in multicultural situations (Marquardt).

U.S. companies realize more and more that they need employees with a high degree of global competence. A survey of graduates at The Garvin School of International Management found that nine in ten of the graduates said their knowledge of other cultures gave them “some” or “a significant” competitive edge (Grosse). Across all sectors (public, for-profit, non-profit), cross-cultural competence was rated as the fifth most important attribute (out of nineteen) of a successful professional in an organization with a global mission (Bikson *New Challenges*). It is clear that Americans cannot afford to have low global competence in the current global economy.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The increased interaction between cultures has also changed the nature of security in America. In the post 9/11 era, most Americans are aware of the threat of international terrorism often perpetrated by non-state actors. Along with that, America has been engaged in military activity in Iraq for years now, and Afghanistan as well. The increase of media markets across the globe creates a new audience for America’s public diplomacy, a tactic which has shown promise internationally, such as with President Barack Obama’s speech to the Islamic World in Cairo. Effectively communicating our message to the world will play a critical role in encouraging countries throughout the Middle East and South Asia to embrace democratic pluralism and reject violent extremism (Committee for Economic Development). However, we cannot convey this message appropriately if there is a serious deficit in our understanding of the culture we are attempting to reach. Michael Lemmon, a former Ambassador to Armenia and former Dean of the School of Language Studies at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute commented on the communication shortcomings that have affected our political efforts in the Middle East:

Part of the reason for our difficulty is that we simply don’t have enough competent speakers of Arabic with credible policy context and an ability to connect with the intended audience so they will at least listen to what we are trying to say and give us a hearing. (Lemmon)

The deficit in skilled foreign language speakers has proven to be very dangerous to our national security in the past. The 9/11 Commission, which investigated the events that caused September 11th, found that “The FBI did not dedicate sufficient resources to the surveillance and translation needs of counter-terrorism agents. It lacked sufficient translators proficient in Arabic and other key languages, resulting in a significant backlog of un-translated intercepts” (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States). This is not a position that we can afford to place ourselves in again, which is why our nation needs more globally competent citizens.

National security stretches beyond potential terrorist activity and war, to issues that effect not only our nation, but

people all over the world. Diseases such as HIV/AIDS are a global security issue. They can affect people in America the same way they can affect people in China, South Africa, or France. Conflicts in the Middle East can lead to increased gas prices all over the world. Famine in Africa can cause food prices to rise globally. It is for this reason that we need globally competent citizens who understand the global aspect of issues such as health and poverty (Zhao).

These types of issues threaten the global population, but they cannot be solved by one nation alone. Global warming has already begun to shrink the Arctic, raise sea levels, and melt glaciers. All these changes affect weather around the world, causing abnormal storms, floods, and draughts. Agricultural production in many nations is affected by the shifting climate, and it also causes an increase in the spread of life-threatening diseases. Human activity is a major cause of global warming and subsequently climate change. Globalization and increased economic development inevitably lead to environmental degradation, deforestation, desertification, and pollution (Zhao).

These problems arise when the middle class in India expands and more people begin driving, contributing to air pollution; when China buys Indonesian timber, increasing deforestation for the sake of profit; when the United States sends its manufacturing plants abroad, consequently increasing pollution in other nations ecosystems (Zhao). These are global problems, and their solutions will require global competence and collaboration across borders.

AMERICAN SOCIETY

America has always been a nation characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity, and that diversity increases every year. In the 2003 Census, Hispanics comprised 13.7 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, "Annual Estimates..."). In 2050, the Hispanic population in the United States is projected to equal one-quarter of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, "Projected Population..."). Even now, in California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas, ethnic and racial minorities account for over half the total state population, and for 40 percent of the total population in Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, and New York (Committee for Economic Development). Increasingly, we encounter people from different cultures in our schools, shopping centers, and workplaces on a daily basis. Even in a small town such as Portland, Maine, with a public school population of less than 8,000 students, 36 languages other than English are spoken (Portland Public Schools). One poll found that 48 percent of Americans have at least weekly dealings with someone whose first language is not English (Committee for Economic Development). Our communities and workplaces will only become more diverse in the future. U.S. companies will need to employ workers who have skills to serve a diverse group of customers domestically as well as internationally. Our students must develop the competencies necessary to live and work in a culturally and linguistically diverse environment.

WE HAVE FALLEN BEHIND

In terms of developing global competency, the United States is deficient in many areas. American students often lack sufficient knowledge about other regions in the world, languages and cultures, and as a result will face great difficulty in competing

and leading in a global environment (Committee for Economic Development).

A survey of young Americans conducted by the Asia Society in 2001 and by the National Geographic Society in 2002 found some alarming information (Committee for Economic Development).

- 83 percent of respondents could not locate Afghanistan on a map.
- 25 percent of college bound high school students could not name the ocean between California and Asia.
- 80 percent did not know that India is the world's largest democracy.
- 37 percent could not locate China on a map of Asia and the Middle East.
- 56 percent could not find India, despite the fact that China and India are the world's most populous countries, and major emerging markets.

Nine countries were surveyed, and young Americans finished second to last, only ahead of young adults in Mexico. The survey revealed that young adults who spoke more than one language and who engaged in international travel fared better. The top performing country was Sweden, where 89 percent of young adults spoke at least two languages, and 92 percent had ventured outside of their home country in the last three years. At the time of the survey, only 36 percent of young Americans spoke more than one language, and only 21 percent had left the U.S. in the last three years (National Geographic Society).

This type of performance has an effect upon how Americans are viewed in the business world. The RAND Corporation surveyed sixteen global corporations about the ability of U.S. universities to produce globally competent graduates. One marketing manager commented that, compared to their counterparts from universities in other parts of the world, U.S. students were "strong technically" but "shortchanged" in cross-cultural experience and "linguistically deprived" (Bikson *Law, Global Preparedness and Human Resources*). One respondent even went so far as to say, "If I wanted to recruit people who are both technically skilled and culturally aware, I wouldn't even waste time looking for them on U.S. college campuses" (Bikson *Law, Global Preparedness and Human Resources*).

According to the National Research Council, "one of the key deterrents to developing a pipeline of young people prepared to develop advanced language proficiency and deep knowledge of countries and cultures is a lack of trained teachers" (National Research Council). Craig Kissock, Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota-Morris, pointed out that the culture of teacher education is local, and as a result has advanced policies that serve the neighborhood schools but not the needs of future citizens of today's globalized world (Cushner). If our level of global competence is to change, then we must begin to provide appropriate teacher training, and implement policy that will change school curriculum.

RESEARCH ON GLOBAL COMPETENCE

Developing global competency requires having the appropriate resources for conducting research, either independently or in the classroom. Books, periodicals, and newspapers can be valuable tools in this regard, but the most useful tool is the Internet,

which gives anyone access to numerous resources. Teachers can find tools online for researching global education and internationalizing the classroom, and students can use online resources to learn about global issues.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING GLOBAL COMPETENCE

International organizations have created websites that are extremely effective at providing the user with resources related to global competence. The Asia Society (www.asiasociety.org) is one of the leading global organizations in the goal of fostering relationships and promoting understanding among people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia. Their website provides access to information regarding global topics such as international political policy related to the environment, contemporary art from around the world, international business and economics, and history of world conflicts.

One of the most useful pieces of the Asia Society website is their direct links to other resources for global education aimed at building global competence. There are a number of methods in which these resources could be utilized for internationalizing class time. If a teacher wants to teach Asian Art in an art class, they could use the “Asian Art Outlook” (www.askasia.org/AsianArt), which provides an online Asian art teaching guide. An English teacher could use “Beyond a Thousand and One Nights: A Sampler of Literature from Muslim Civilization” (www.cie.org) to expose students to foreign literature in the context of a Language Arts class. Utilizing available communications technology, it is even possible for American students to interact with other students across the globe through iEARN (www.iearn.org), a non-profit organization that connects 15,000 schools in 100 countries for collaborative project work via the Internet. A directory of these and many other international studies resources can be found at the Asia Society website (<http://asiasociety.org/files/resources.pdf>).

Other international organization websites with similar resources are:

- **Council on Foreign Relations** (www.cfr.org)
Provides extensive and up-to-date information on foreign-policy issues across the globe.
- **World Affairs Council** (www.world-affairs.org)
Includes the ‘Global Classroom’ program, which connects teachers and students with resources, ideas, and people for bringing the world into the classroom.
- **World Bank** (www.worldbank.org)
Contains a ‘Learning’ section for current global issues such as climate change, urban development, and health systems.
- **United Nations** (www.un.org)
Contains extensive and specific information on most current global issues from a great variety of perspectives.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN THE NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY SYSTEM

The New York State library system grants anyone access to immeasurable research aids. Simply by acquiring a library card, one has free access to books, periodicals, newspapers, and possibly even audio or video recordings related to global competence. Computer kiosks located in all public libraries

allow anyone to search all the resources available at the library. It is not necessary to know a specific topic to conduct research. Even if a student only has a vague idea of the subject they would like to investigate, they can perform a “keyword” search, which will direct them toward a variety of resources related to the keywords of the subject.

Even more useful, however, is the state library’s free online database, the New York Online Virtual Electronic Library, accessible at (<http://novelnewyork.org>). This is a large database of resources that can be accessed from anywhere, and all one needs to gain access to this database is a New York State driver’s license, or a NYS DMV non-driver photo ID. From this website, users have access to state, national, and international newspapers dating back as far as 1977. The site also grants the user access to ProQuest Platinum, perhaps the most useful online resource for finding periodicals related to almost any topic.

Let us say, for example, a student has heard about the growing importance of China in the world and is interested in finding out more about this. From the New York Online Virtual Electronic Library, the student could quickly gain access to ProQuest Platinum. The introductory screen shows the “Basic Search” option for the ProQuest database. If we assume this student has only basic knowledge of the subject, China, and does not know what specifically to search for, then it is likely they would simply insert the word ‘China’ into the search box. ProQuest is particularly useful because from there it will essentially guide the user towards a plethora of topics related to the subject. The most recent periodical articles with China in the title will appear, as well as a box of suggested topics. For the word ‘China,’ the suggestions include ‘China (location) AND International relations’ or ‘China (location) AND Economic growth.’ If they select the latter, they will be taken to articles about China’s growing economy from periodicals such as Newsweek, or Foreign Affairs. The list of articles will also include reviews of books related to China’s growing economy. The inclusion of book reviews provides the student with great leads on conducting further, more in-depth research if they desire. If the student does not think these results are specific enough, they can narrow them further by selecting more specific topics now provided by the suggestion box. This time it includes topics such as ‘Economic conditions,’ ‘Economic development,’ and ‘International trade.’ Selecting any one of these will bring up more specific articles in relation to China’s economy. With this useful tool, anyone can begin researching global topics with no prior knowledge and quickly be led toward more in-depth information.

CAREERS RELATED TO GLOBAL COMPETENCE

As global education becomes more prevalent and global competency increases, American students will become increasingly interested in global careers. In the private sector, U.S. multinational corporations will most likely have many positions that involve living and working across the globe. They often post information related to their vacancies in university career offices. For college students, the school’s career center will probably be able to shed some light on these potential positions. For those young people who are just interested in examining the possibilities, the most effective place to begin looking is within international organizations.

The two most common types of international organizations

are Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These organizations are involved in international issues such as disease prevention, poverty reduction, development, economic cooperation and much more. There are so many that they are difficult to find without any prior knowledge of the organization, but several university libraries and other groups have posted indexes of these organizations online:

- **Northwestern University Library** Links to IGOs (www.library.northwestern.edu/govinfo/resource/internat/igo.html) Provides a list of IGOs organized alphabetically, with links to each organization's home page. Site also has a custom IGO search engine that will find related IGO websites based on keywords.
- **University of California Berkeley Library** Links to NGOs (www.lib.berkeley.edu/doemoff/govinfo/intl/gov_ngos.html) Provides a list of links to NGOs based on region of operation and issues the organization addresses. Also contains a custom NGO search engine that finds related NGO websites based on keywords.
- **NGO Global Network** (www.ngo.org) Contains an extensive list of links to NGOs. User can decide to organize the list alphabetically, or by issues the organization addresses.

The web pages for these organizations will all have a link to 'Employment' or 'Careers.' As an example, one of the most well-known international organizations is the United Nations. On their homepage (www.un.org) there is a section titled 'Resources and Services' which contains a link to 'Employment.' This will lead to a page which gives general information on employment within the U.N., information on how to apply for a position at the U.N., as well as links to a list of current vacancies. A curious young adult can select the link for current available positions, and find a page that lists positions at the United Nations, organized by occupational groups. These groups are fields such as economic affairs, human rights, medical, political affairs, public information, and potentially many others as the availability of positions shifts. Selecting, for example, 'Human Rights,' will then lead to a list of available positions in this occupational group. These positions are located all over the globe, in cities such as Geneva, Beirut, and Tbilisi. Selecting a position takes the user to more specific information. This includes the responsibilities of the job, the competencies required of applicants, and all skills and experience that would make someone a viable candidate for the position. This is an excellent way to investigate the employment potential for international careers. These types of listings give a very clear picture of what competencies and skills must be developed to be employed internationally. They also provide an idea of the fields in which international work may be available in the future. Most international organizations approach employment in this manner. There are so many in existence that it is not difficult for any individual to find one that does work in their field of interest. As a method for learning about the types of global careers that exist, this manner of inquiry is very effective.

CONCLUSION

Globalization will continue to reach new heights as time goes on, and the distances between people and cultures will get smaller and smaller. Not only will we be required to interact with people all over the globe in the future, but we will also be required to rely on them. The recent economic recession across the world provides all the necessary proof that the economy is now connected on a global scale. However this is not the only issue that brings us together. Terrorism, perpetrated by non-state actors, has touched nations all over the world, global warming is changing the climate of our planet more each year, and human migration is constantly altering the demographics of every nation's local communities. Unfortunately, as stated by Harvard University Professor Fernando Reimers, "few schools around the world today are equipping students with the skills and habits of mind necessary to collaborate with others, across national boundaries, in inventing and implementing lasting solutions to these challenges."

The resources for appropriately educating our students are available. Technology has improved to the point where everyone can access the same information and communicate across the world with a level of ease experienced by no generation before us. The key will be to create effective policy and programs for developing global competence in our schools. If we cannot increase our competencies in dealing with the rest of the world, then we will soon find ourselves isolated to the point of our own detriment.

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