

# **A Kosovo Critical Case Study**

**Cameron White, PhD**

## **Introduction**

This critical case study investigates intercultural education experiences at the University of Prishtina's Faculty of Education in Kosovo. The data included pre and post open-ended surveys, one on one interviews, and follow up interviews with students to determine their general perceptions, knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding intercultural education. The findings suggest contextualizing issues of intercultural education in doctoral studies in education, integrating local to global connections in teaching, research, and service, and increasing intercultural experiences.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to deepen the understanding of intercultural education with Kosovo as a critical case study. The focus of this study was to determine Kosovo doctoral students' perspectives regarding intercultural education. The research question is: What are Kosovo doctoral students' general perceptions, knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding intercultural education?

The intercultural context in which this research is conducted makes the study relevant and innovative. Kosovo is the newest country in Europe declaring independence in 2008 following decades of hardship under former Yugoslavia and Serbia (1980s, 1990s). The educational system during the 90s operated under conditions that included formal schooling being banned by the Serbs and Kosovars organizing a "parallel" education system in private

houses. As a result of this and in view of its aspirations to join the European arena, Kosovo embraced the concept of intercultural education by learning from the practices and models of other education systems and through orienting towards modern values of democratic and global citizenship in its school and teacher education curricula.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Developing the critical capacity for “new operational and cultural ‘knowledge’ in order to acquire a global perspective that provides access to new forms of work, civic and private practices in their everyday lives” is vital in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Lankshear and Knoble 2003). Our educational approaches could be the place to enable the critical investigation of meaningful knowledge and issues, debates regarding globalization, and relevant problem-based global education that can provide the context for developing the skills engage in active transformation for social justice. “Reading the world” through context and relevant connections provides the opportunity to apply knowledge and develop skills in critical ways, as Kincheloe (2005) recommends. Responsible global citizenship requires knowledge of “others” in the world, whoever they might be. It also requires the skills to understand and act in the best interest of the majority of the people.

The knowledge base should include an understanding of who people and cultures in the world are, what they do, and where they are. The skill set should include inquiry and critical literacy/thinking skills, leading to activism. Rethinking teaching and learning in these ways could provide the opportunity to deepen our understanding and appreciation of others in the world, something essential to our roles and responsibilities as global citizens. Given the global interconnectedness of the world today, the local to global context must be present. According to Merryfield (2008), students must develop a global perspective that will emphasize cross-cultural

experiential learning and stress commonalities in cultures that transcend diversity.

James suggests that interculturalizing education develops a sense of interconnectedness, empathy, and tolerance, which are much needed in today's world.

## **Methods**

Critical qualitative research methods (CQRM) were implemented prior to, during, and after the project (Steinberg and Canella, 2012). CQRM assumes issues of equity and social justice in teaching, research, and service, challenging traditional approaches through bricolage, subjectivity, and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Critical qualitative research informs global / intercultural education through a lens that ensures the investigation of issues in education tied to power and privilege, ultimately leading to advocacy, agency, and activism (White, 2018). Critical qualitative educational research also highlights the need to cultivate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for global and civic awareness and responsibility. This methodology borrows from many other qualitative research methodologies; however, what distinguishes it from other methodologies is its orientation on the social justice and societal transformation (LaBoskey, 2004).

Methods integrated include story / narrative, open-ended and semi-structured interviews / surveys (individual and focus group). Specific CQRM included pre and post project open-ended surveys, individual interviews with doctoral students, and follow-up interviews over time. A convenience sample of Kosovo doctoral students in education were sent the open-ended survey and asked to complete the survey and send back to the Fulbright Specialist prior to his arriving in Kosovo during the initial year and again to the second cohort during the following year. An initial activity during the teaching portion of the project included small group and then large group sharing of the survey responses. Subsequently the courses designed for the project focused

on an investigating themes and issues in global and intercultural education. During the courses, individual interviews were conducted; following the courses, students were asked to complete the post-survey; and then they were asked to engage in a follow-up interviews approximately 6 months after the courses. All data were recorded, transcribed and coded to determine relevant themes at each point.

## **Findings**

While responses to the pre-experience survey were quite general, they did provide a basic understanding of the concepts of global and intercultural education. Initial responses from the doctoral students indicate a need to be active in the world in order to affect change. Responses also indicated a variety of perceptions regarding global education, but generally suggested an understanding and appreciation of peoples and nations. Following the initial survey, students then participated a variety of global education teaching and learning modules / courses including readings, discussion, activities, and projects.

Sample responses include from the initial survey include:

“Global education is important because it helps learners to understand interdependence in the world, understand that the person is part of the world, and that everybody's actions, positive or negative, have effects beyond themselves, community and the country where he lives.”

“Changes are always brought through actions. People around the world have to act and actively participate in different projects nationally and interculturality that aim to promote

human rights, education, social justice. It is the only way to create a better future for all people living in the world.”

“Global and intercultural education contributes to the awareness and consciousness of the students, respecting different diversity, as racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic; it contributes in the understanding of human and natural diversity as social and natural values. Global education also helps in preparation of the students to become an active citizen in their benefits, society and the environment too.”

A variety of themes emerged from initial coding of the responses from the pre-experience survey. Initial themes included active citizenship, importance of global and cultural understanding, and the possibility of change through better intercultural connections. These are often listed as goals of global / intercultural education (White, 2018). The students expressed some confusion initially when addressing concepts such as global education, intercultural education, comparative education, globalization, and intercultural education, but were able to debate and distinguish ideas, examples and issues as the experience progressed.

Sample responses include from the post-experience survey and interviews include: “Global / intercultural education is a creative approach of bringing about change in our society. Is an active learning process based on the universal values of tolerance, solidarity, equality, justice, inclusion, co-operation and non-violence. Global / intercultural education begins with raising awareness of global and cultural challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, violent conflicts or human rights. Global education motivates and empowers people to become active, responsible global citizens.”

“Global / intercultural education is important because people around the world in different ways are linked and need to connect and communicate to each other in an interconnected society of the world. It is important because it help people to be more engaged in global society, to build bridges across different cultures, civilizations, languages, religions and races. It is important to make people to reflect for their role in the world and to be aware for global issues.”

“Global / intercultural education is important because it helps learners to understand the interdependence in the world, understand that the person is part of the world, and that everybody's actions (positive or negative) have effects beyond themselves, community and the country where he lives. Global / intercultural education contributes to the awareness and consciousness of the students, respecting different diversity, as racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic; it contributes in the understanding of human and natural diversity as social and natural values. Global education also helps in preparation of the students to become an active citizen in their benefits, society and the environment too.”

The post-experience survey results demonstrate much more depth of understanding and impact of global / intercultural education, perhaps as a result of the project experience.

Participants shared specific examples and issues and indicated the importance of these concepts much more strongly. Awareness is suggested as vital with global connections as a beginning, but that education (teaching and learning) also needs to include more active involvement in intercultural contexts. Participants also focused on a variety of global issues necessary to address in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Themes emerging from the experiences and post-experience survey and follow-up interviews demonstrate a more in-depth awareness, appreciation, and interest in global / intercultural education. Specific themes commonly addressed include global citizenship, community, tolerance, and culture. Themes are often mentioned in connection with what participants list as important global issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students also expressed ongoing interest in activism tied to global / intercultural issues, including educating the world about Kosovo and other developing nations issues following the experience.

### **Significance**

The themes that have emerged from the data collected in this study can raise a number of questions that are relevant for the contexts that are working on intercultural education and embracing global issues. The Kosovo context is unique in terms of having come out of an ethnic conflict less than two decades ago and the country is still having challenges to secure the opportunities for proper intercultural education due to financial difficulties and limited possibilities for student and staff mobility. Therefore, this research raises the following important questions that need to be addressed by the intercultural education research in order to provide a frame for countries to develop an agenda improved intercultural education:

What best practices create quality cross-cultural experiences for faculty, staff, and students and promote awareness of global / intercultural issues?

How important is direct connection between people and cultures to improve global understanding?

How can we best integrate global / intercultural education in school and university classes?

Does knowing about global / intercultural education enhance professional development opportunities for teachers and teacher educators?

In what ways does it enhance students global understanding in considering the perspectives of others?

What additional global / intercultural experiences, questions, and issues need investigating?

What are specific needs of Kosovo regarding global / intercultural education?

Finally, the study demonstrated that global / intercultural education and experiences teaches us how to live in an intercultural context, and provides vital knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Kosovo's context has shown that it is critical that education focuses on cultural awareness and diversity. This study also provides a model for advancing global / intercultural education beyond traditional approaches through true intercultural and transnational experiences, using a local to global framework.

## References

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