

# **Global skills: From economic competitiveness to cultural understanding and critical pedagogy**

***Douglas Bourn***

**Institute of Education, University of London**

The global economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 has heightened the need for all sectors of education and learning to address their relationship to the skills for living and working in a global society and global economy. Recognising the wealth of literature and range of views and perspectives on globalisation, this paper summarises recent research in the UK on what is meant by global skills and how it is perceived within further education. This research was based on identifying how further education and training providers and employers were interpreting the term global skills and how this related to academic discourses around globalisation and learning. The research identified that despite a strong UK government-led agenda on skills for a global economy, programmes and initiatives within further education colleges and other training providers identified not only an economic driven perspective, but one that valued intercultural understanding and a more critically reflective and radical approach.

This paper summaries the themes emerging from this research and suggests that there are linkages between the different interpretations of what is meant by global skills to broader educational discourses, neo-liberal, intercultural and critical pedagogical approaches. The research undertaken on global skills also identified that these interpretations and linkages with particular discourses often overlapped and inter-linked in terms of their implementation within further education colleges to their responses to the challenges of globalisation. The paper concludes by outlining a potential framework for global skills that whilst taking account of the different interpretations of the term poses an approach that puts valuing different perspectives, critical reflection and complexity at its heart.

## **Globalisation and Education**

The debates around globalisation and education have been well covered by people such as Burbules and Torres (2000), Apple, Kenway and Singh (2005), and Edwards and Usher (2008). Whilst much of the discourse has been around the economic impact of globalisation on education, there has been recognition that globalisation raises some major new challenges particularly in terms of what and how people learn.

Ulrick Beck has noted that one of the main political responses to globalisation has been to build and develop the education and knowledge society. This he suggests has led to making training longer rather than shorter, and to loosening or doing away with links to a particular job or occupation, gearing learning instead to key qualifications that can be widely used in practice. Beck goes on to suggest this should be seen not only in terms of 'flexibility' but also in areas such "as social competence, ability to work in a team, conflict resolution, understanding of other cultures, integrated thinking and a capacity to handle uncertainties and paradoxes of secondary modernity". (Beck, 2000, p.137-8)

Beck also notes that learning within the framework of globalisation poses questions about where, what and how people learn. Part of the exciting dialectic of globalisation, he suggests, is that it replaces

“traditional lecturing societies with dialogic attentiveness and courage to disagree—people beginning to realise transnationalisation of uneventful education and curricula” (Beck, 2000, p.138).

Globalisation, as Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard (2004) suggest, engenders complexity. This necessitates a new paradigm for learning including the need for skills that recognise different perspectives, working in a more flexible manner and with diverse groups of people.

Globalisation also poses challenges in terms of where and in what form people learn. For example, there is the question of the impact of instant global access to information and knowledge on how people learn. Secondly, how does increased social mobility, contact and dialogue with people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds impact on people’s understanding of the wider world? Thirdly, there is the impact of events elsewhere in the world on what and how people learn in a specific locality. The most obvious recent example of this is global terrorism and attitudes within and between communities on fundamentalist views. Finally, there are the myriad cultural influences that many learners face, particularly in western and more industrialised countries, and the impact this has in terms of a person’s own sense of identity and belonging (Kenway and Bullen, 2008; Jarvis, 2007).

Whilst it can be noted within some of these debates, particularly Jarvis (2007), and Kenway and Bullen (2008), that learning needs to be more global in outlook, there has been less discussion on the direct impact of globalisation and the skills that learners need to develop to make sense of these forces. What is perhaps not disputable is that nation-states in the development of their educational programmes can no longer ignore learning about other cultures, societies and political systems. For economic and cultural reasons, people will need to understand and engage with different viewpoints and perspectives. As Burbules and Torres (2000) have commented, “the global context presents a fundamentally different sort of challenge to education than in the Enlightenment framework” (p. 21). They further state that “whereas previously education was more focused on the needs and development of the individual”, the context of “a global world broadens the outlines of ‘community’ beyond family, the region, or the nation. Today the communities of potential affiliation are multiple, dislocated, provisional, and ever-changing” (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 21-22).

These points have been developed by Ray (2007) who suggests that globalisation can lead to increased hybridity in a more complex and fluid world. Living in a globalised world, he suggests, does not create homogeneity and polarisation but can create an eclectic mix of identities and perspectives. France (2007) raises a similar point in stating that globalisation can lead to the increased individualisation of societies, the disembedding of traditions and the emergence of uncertainty and fluidity.

This means, as Rizvi (2000) notes, that globalisation in the context of education and learning needs to have a strong social and cultural as well as an economic dimension. Waters (1995) goes even further and suggests that globalisation of human society is contingent on the extent to which cultural arrangements are effective relative to economic and political arrangements.

The tendency within many industrialised countries in looking at globalisation and education has been to respond by promoting more international programmes and a more international outlook. Knight (2003) has defined internationalisation within higher education for example, as a “process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service of an institution” (p. 2). It involves, she suggests, “sharing knowledge through mobility of staff and students”

(Knight, 2003, p. 2), adopting broader outlooks which recognise other viewpoints, recognising new global institutions, preparing students for working anywhere in the world and finally recognising and understanding views of others.

This intercultural or cosmopolitan perspective on internationalisation has however in many instances become lost or subsumed within a neo-liberal agenda around economic needs. Therefore you get 'internationalisation' strategies with regard to schools, colleges or universities, dominated by seeing elsewhere in the world as part of the institution's market place or as partners in projects or initiatives and often in a form that is based on Northern dominance over Southern institutions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Schoorman, 2000; Tormey, 2006).

However, internationalisation strategies can and in some instances do, as Caruana and Spurling (2007) suggest, provide openings for different approaches. They suggest in their review of literature on internationalisation in higher education that the discourse can "entail a shift in thinking and attitudes" (p. 24) and that the pedagogy can move beyond a narrow economic focus to incorporate social, cultural, moral and ethical dimensions. There is evidence in the UK at least, of examples within higher education of strategies that link globalisation and education to opportunities to rethink curriculum content and learning that recognise and value differing cultural perspectives and critical thinking, and that promote concepts of global citizenship (Bourn & Shiel, 2009; Jones & Brown, 2007).

These discourses suggest that a key need in responding to globalisation in education is to identify and support learners with the relevant skills to make sense of what is happening around them, to be able to recognise different interpretations and viewpoints and above all to know how to deal with uncertainty and complexity.

## **Policy Context**

In most industrialised countries, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has been a raft of policy initiatives and statements about the need to refocus educational priorities within the context of globalisation. For example within Europe there have been a number of policies and statements linked to the training needs of economies. These are based on what were called the 'Lisbon goals', later the Copenhagen Declaration, and now the European education and training 2010 targets (European Commission, 2009).

Key objectives for these targets within vocational education and training, for example, are the development of skills for the knowledge society, ensuring access to ICT for everyone, making learning attractive, supporting active citizenship, improving foreign language expertise and increasing mobility and exchange (Leney, 2004). One example is the European Parliament's 2006 recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning. This identified eight key competences: communication in the mother tongue, communication in a foreign language, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression (European Union, 2006).

Globalisation has been recognised in these policy initiatives, particularly in terms of technological advances, faster access to communications, deregulation of trade and capital movements and rapid growth of transnational business (Leney, 2004).

There are a number of policies and programmes in various European countries that reinforce these trends particularly in relation to vocational education (Fien, Maclean and Park, 2009). In the context of this paper, the UK will be taken as the main focus, in part because it has been the focus of my research on global skills but also because it shows some of the contradictions, obstacles and opportunities for debate about learning and skills for a global society and economy that move beyond a technocratic and economic perspective.

The UK is a central player in the global economy, with one quarter of UK jobs connected to overseas business. It may be in the top ten of largest economies in the world but is ranked only seventeenth in terms of human capital (Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2007). This challenge of upskilling the workforce was a key driver behind the UK government's review of skills, called the Leitch Review. This review stated that unless the UK develops a more highly skilled workforce it will not be able to compete effectively on the global stage (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2006). Skills are therefore predominantly seen in the context of improving economic growth (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009).

Similar statements can be seen in the UK's Learning and Skills Council review of skills in 2007, which stated that: "Globalisation presents opportunities as well as threats. The opening up of markets leads to increased competition that will likely lead to an increased demand for skills, but employer responses may sometimes be too late" (Learning and Skills Council, 2007, p. 12).

This need for education to be seen in terms of a global skills race has been reflected in a range of UK policy statements. Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2008) stated that the challenge for "this century is a global skills race. . . . Globalisation dictates that the nations that succeed will be those that bring out the best in people and their potential."

This drive for global competition has dominated strategies in the UK and in other industrialised countries that relate to increased international involvement in education. Two examples of this are *Putting the World into World Class Education* (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2004); and an international strategy for further education entitled *Globalisation* (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills [DIUS], 2008).

These strategies whilst reinforcing the dominant economic agenda of equipping the learner to work in a 'competitive global economy' and 'maximising the contribution of our education and training sector and university research to overseas trade and investment' did also suggest that people should "have the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to fulfil themselves, to live in and contribute effectively to a global society" (DfES, 2004, p. 6). The UK government's globalisation strategy for further education (DIUS, 2008) showed similar contradictions. The first goal includes "equipping learners for life in a global society...by instilling a strong global dimension" (p. 12). There is also reference to "improving understanding and appreciation of other countries, their working methods, cultures and faiths" (p. 12). However, there is also reference to "promoting UK education overseas" and "making the UK an international leader in the creative use of technology for education and training" (p. 13).

Underpinning these policies therefore were two strands: one that saw learning and globalisation in the context of skills to compete effectively in a global market place; and secondly an approach that valued learning about the global society as an important component of education for the twenty-first century.

The discourses around these strands will be explored alongside the view that amidst these contradictions, a third strand emerged as an unintended bi-product and that is the opening of spaces for a more critical pedagogical discourse around global skills, global learning and global citizenship.

## **Skills in the Context of Globalisation**

Key to responding to the challenges of globalisation within education, it is suggested, is to open up the debates around what is or could be meant by global skills. The evidence from the research in this area (Bourn, 2008) suggests there are a number of competing and in some cases contradictory programmes but there is also a recognition that the traditional notions around what is meant by skills need to be re-considered in the light of globalisation.

The term 'skills' is one most used in the UK, for example, to frame the debates around education and learning within further education. Whilst the term 'skills' can mean technical competencies and vocational knowledge, it can also incorporate 'softer' skills around communication, solving problems and completing tasks. Perspectives on what kind of skills should be included are also linked to the specific social context or nature of the profession. These discussions and debates become more complex when the skills needed for, say, twenty years from now are perhaps yet to be invented. For example skills could be seen as an ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems and the capacity to perform a set of tasks developed through the acquisition of experience and/or training which require more than just knowing about the subject. This approach to skills is thus more than occupational and technical, including transferable skills, skills for everyday life, and wider employability skills (see Bourn, 2008).

Skills could therefore be interpreted in terms of specific needs in response to impact of globalisation on the nature of tasks to be undertaken, including increased abilities in areas such as IT or languages. They could also be interpreted in terms of transferable skills, ability to adapt to changing environments, working practices and social needs. Finally, global skills could also be seen in terms of being able to deal with complexity, uncertainty and insecurity in relation to the ever changing needs of economies, societies and educational practices.

A necessary starting point however is to address the question of whether we are talking about generic skills in the context of globalisation, or specific skills that require enhancement and support for people to engage effectively in society and equip them to work in the global economy.

As already mentioned, a key element of European strategies on skills has been the recognition of the importance of economic competition through improvements in human capital and the promotion of social inclusion. (Haahr & Hansen, 2006). This means that in the development of thinking on 'global skills' consideration needs to be given to social as well as economic needs.

However, this identification of the social alongside the economic has not always been promoted. Indeed the perception many educational practitioners would have of skills is that the agenda is really about raising standards of basic skills such as numeracy and literacy alongside relevant technical skills appropriate to the specific sector. But there is evidence, as already suggested and reinforced by statements by UK Prime Minister, that there is a need in the era of globalisation to recognise a wider concept of skills. Gordon Brown (2008) stated that "fulfilling the demands of a global jobs market

requires us to nurture creativity, interpersonal skills and technical abilities, as well as analytical intelligence” (para. 5).

It could be argued that generic skills in the context of globalisation could refer to areas such as being prepared to communicate well with a range of people, and recognising their cultural and social differences. Language skills could be referred to as an important area to encourage. Secondly, working within a global economy requires skills to respond to rapidly changing needs, being prepared to take on a variety of tasks and being able to adapt and continually recognise the need for developing new skills and knowledge. Thirdly, in the context of working with others, understanding cultural difference and developing skills to work with people in collective environments from a range of backgrounds could be crucial.

## **Interpretations of Global Skills**

If one reviewed the usage of the term global skills, a wide variation of interpretations could be found. They include business and training perspectives, such as those exemplified by training and consultancy company Worldwide which is based in the USA (<http://www.eworldwise.com/whatisglobalskills.php>; accessed 19 February 2010):

Global Skills are foundational business skills for companies seeking to enhance their global competitiveness, and which focus on acquiring the necessary local country knowledge as it pertains to communication, relationship-building and problem-solving skills.

Another American example of the usage of the term is through a training programme by Intrax Internships Abroad for interns working abroad with a particular emphasis on preparing for cultural difference (<http://www.intraxinternshipsabroad.com/global-skills>; accessed 19 February 2010).

A large number of small training providers are increasingly using the term partly as a way of marketing themselves but also because there is an increasing recognition that new forms of skills are being required by companies. An example of this in London in the UK is The Global Skills College. This institution runs training workshops on areas such as teamwork, IT, conflict resolution, and problem solving skills ([http://www.lpi-global-skills.org.uk/workshop\\_schedule.php](http://www.lpi-global-skills.org.uk/workshop_schedule.php); accessed 19 February 2010).

What one finds therefore are references to global skills in the light of responding to global economic needs, a recognition of intercultural understanding and more attention to be given to transferable skills. What is perhaps distinctive about the usage of the term global skills in the UK is that it has also been used by educationalists who are interested in promoting a greater understanding of global and international development issues. This has meant that the term global skills has been promoted as part of UK government funded programmes be they for schools, colleges or universities that wish to promote concepts of global citizenship and greater global understanding that go beyond economic or intercultural approaches (Bourn & Shiel, 2009; Hicks & Holden, 2007). This body of practice comes under the umbrella of what in the UK is called development education or global learning (Bourn, 2008). An example here is the British Council supported programme on Global School Partnerships which in its training for teachers refers to the following global skills as being at the core of a global education curriculum: co-operation and conflict resolution, expressing views, critical thinking, participation and creative thinking (<http://globalschools.britishcouncil.org>; accessed 7 September 2011).

Research was undertaken to identify where and how further education and training providers in the UK were using and interpreting the term 'global skills' and also how these providers have responded to the challenges of the globalisation in terms of the form and content of the learning they offer (Bourn, 2008).

In reviewing the differing interpretations of the usage of the term global skills, the research identified are some common themes. The first is the linkage between skills and economic needs, particularly in the context of the global market forces. This is often interpreted as promoting the need for greater priority to skills such as teamwork, IT, languages and problem solving. Secondly there is the theme around greater intercultural understanding often related to international travel, working in different countries or recognising the increasingly cultural diverse nature of workforces. Finally there is the more radical perspective that has its origins outside of further education and training but sees the usage of the term global skills as a way of promoting global perspectives and critical thinking.

This paper will now address in more detail each of these three perspectives and relate their interpretations to both theory and practical application.

### **Global Skills as Skills for Work in a Global Economy**

For many businesses and employers, the term 'global skills' is most likely to be seen as directly linked to equipping the learner to be an effective employee within the global economy. But the evidence from the UK and elsewhere suggests a linkage between appropriate technical skills and wider social and cultural skills related to communication, problem-solving and ability to work in different cultural environments.

There is evidence in the UK for example from a number of studies that give increased emphasis to areas such as transferable skills, team working, good interpersonal skills and the capacity to deal with uncertainty and solve problems (Learning and Skills Council, 2007). Research by Newton, Hurtsfield, Miller, Page, and Akroyd (2005) for the UK government's Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) reinforces the value that employers are placing on softer skills, including positive self-esteem, reliability and initiative.

Such generic skills are acknowledged within large companies, for example through workforce requirements in terms of ability to work in a range of complex social and cultural environments, being culturally sensitive and being able to communicate with a wide range of customers.

In undertaking research in the UK on how companies perceive the term global skills, these were some of the responses identified from existing literature or via internet searches.

KPMG, the international audit company, state the following on their website (<http://www.kpmg.com>; accessed 19 February 2010):

So what exactly are we looking for when we recruit new people? Naturally, we want you to have good technical skills, problem-solving abilities and commercial focus. We're also looking for people with a lot of integrity—good team workers who can build effective relationships, learn from experience and bring out the best in others.

In their review of global skills, a key senior figure within the company stated, “technology and globalization has changed the nature of our workforce. . . we have to be flexible to ensure we attract and retain talent with a global perspective” (KPMG, 2008).

Beverly Salt from AstraZeneca, a leading international company, has stated that, in order for companies to compete globally, they

need staff who are not only excellent in their chosen discipline, have strong leadership ethic and capability, and (also) are comfortable working in a global environment, interacting with colleagues from across the world and preferably willing to work in different countries (Salt as cited in Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2007, p. 40).

In an interview with the author (April 9, 2008), Salt has also raised the importance of employees needing to get used to living and working in a complex environment. They need to be ‘fit for the future’ and ideally have had an education, particularly at school, that gives them the basis of being able to apply this understanding of the wider world within a range of social and cultural environments.

There is also the point made by one employer in the UK that the complexity of supply chains requires skills that understand different social, cultural and economic needs and are adaptable:

In the past it was simple! You selected your suppliers from your area, and they used the materials that were to hand. This delivered your project in such a way that the project’s impact on the environment was automatically as low as it could realistically be. This is no longer the case. Nowadays, the complexity of materials and components, from an ever increasing global supply chain, means that your management must have a thorough knowledge of the entire supply chain and exactly how it all fits together, in order to make the right decision. (as cited in Bourn, 2008, p. 22)

Therefore whilst a global perspective may not emerge specifically within employer needs, there is evidence to suggest that some understanding, experience and ability to work within a range of social and cultural settings are seen as increasingly important. Archer, a recruitment consultant, has suggested that not only understanding the wider world is important, but also an ability to make connections between local and global questions and to have some experience of what this means is becoming essential for many employers. (Archer, 2005)

Research by Bourn and Sharma (2008) on engineering companies’ perceptions of the value of global skills has reinforced these views. Senior staff from a well-known Japanese automobile manufacturer, for example, emphasised the importance of recruiting engineers who have all-round interpersonal skills, fit into their culture, have an objective focus and an ability to identify and resolve problems quickly. Intercultural sensitivity was a key skill for them:

That is key for us because the perception that some people may have is that engineering is not very global. However, sensitivity to different perspectives, nationalities and cultures, languages, locations, time zones and different styles of working in different countries is crucial. This is often lacking in people from the UK. Because we are a Japanese company, this becomes very important for us. (as cited in Bourn & Sharma, 2008, p. 203)



These comments are echoed in other countries. For example the German Employers Association (BDA) has pointed out that it expects its workers to 'have the capacity for integrated thinking and knowledge about world economics and ecology, as well as an ability to work in teams, deal with complexity, take responsibility, have a strong personality, refer to a stable set of values, feel empathy and be interculturally competent (Toepper, 2003).

The global auditing company, Price Waterhouse Coopers' (PWC) professional development programme, Ulysses, makes similar points. It puts a strong emphasis on global reasoning and positive world change:

PWC's young people will have to take on some very complex global challenges in the years to come, and they will need more than business skills and an MBA – they will also have to be socially aware, possess intercultural communication skills, be thoughtful, committed to accountability and above all compassionate. (as cited in Bourn & Neal, 2008, p. 11)

There is evidence at least from large international companies that global skills are seen as being linked to having the skills to work in a range of cultural environments, being adaptable with a recognition of broader social needs and agendas. But this should not detract from the context within which employers and also policy-makers see global skills and that is economic competition and being an effective employee.

## **Global Skills as Skills to Engage People from Different Cultures**

The term global skills has also been used in the broader discourses around cross-cultural education and cosmopolitanism which have, as Morrow and Torres (2000) suggest, been given new life by the linkages with globalisation. They however also suggest that globalisation, depending on who has access to instant communications, has also led to reinforcement of dominant western notions linked to interculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

This tradition is rooted in discourses around intercultural education which is based on preparing learners to 'act as interpreters and mediators between different cultures on mutual bases' (Lasonen, 2009) In the context of further education for example this can be interpreted as adopting a 'co-operative and team-working approach as mediators, interpreters and active agents between different cultures' (Lasonen, 2009, p.196). This tradition builds on UNESCO approaches that values cultural diversity, and encourages cultural knowledge with the aim of seeking respect, solidarity and understanding amongst individuals, groups and nations (UNESCO, 2001).

This view of global skills in the UK context is closely linked to practices related to international experience and working in a multicultural setting. For example, in one of the key strategic initiatives in this area from the Centre for Excellence in Leadership there is a comment that global skills must include recognition of the skills for living and working in a multicultural society and this means "completely repositioning institutional approaches to international education" (Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2007, p.15).

An example of this approach in the UK is a series of standards, called National Occupational Standards on Intercultural Working, aimed at best practice in working with people from different countries or diverse cultures. These standards, devised by CILT, the National Centre for Language

Teaching in the UK (CILT, 2008), suggest how by investing in increased intercultural understanding there would be a more effective workforce. It also states that 'globalisation makes intercultural understanding a business imperative'.

As mentioned earlier in this paper there has been an expansion of international programmes in all sectors of education, much of which has been driven by globalisation. The main manifestation of these programmes within further and higher education has been in terms of partnerships between institutions including study visits of staff and exchanges of students. In further education in the UK, this is seen as the cornerstone of the Association of Colleges' programme of international work through its International Charter.

This area of international partnership and experience has also been supported in the UK through the British Council and the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) for International Education, first launched in 1999 and followed by a second phase five-year strategy for 2006-2011, emphasising the importance of international students and partnerships with colleges overseas.

A considerable number of colleges throughout the UK are engaged in partnership programmes, be it Grimsby Institute and its links with China, or Park Lane College, Leeds and its dialogue with colleges in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The College in Grimsby for example produced a resource pack for all staff and learners that celebrated and promote different cultural traditions within the local society (Blum, Bourn and Bentall, 2009)

Greenwich Community College, in London, has been one of the leading colleges in making connections between the diverse nature of its student body and internationalism. Its current international strategy makes reference to the development of international partnerships "in order to learn from and share best practice with other countries" (Woodcock, 2006, p. 3). The College recognises the importance of high standards and that international work necessitates recognition of ethical dimensions (Woodcock, 2006).

The value of these international initiatives and exchanges has been critiqued in relation to school education (Martin, 2007; Leonard, 2008), in critiques which question the extent to which this form of learning can merely reinforce existing dominant ideological perceptions of the partner country and culture. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have noted in regard to higher education that there is little evidence that student exchanges and overseas visits challenge dominant orthodoxies between the rich and the poor in the world. They state that despite much talk about global interconnectivity and interdependence, "international contact remains within globally differentiated cultural communities - the west versus the rest" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 175).

Behind the strategies for partnerships and links is therefore the assumption that mere intercultural experience can help to gain greater understanding of the wider world. What is suggested here, based on evidence from Martin (2007) and Leonard (2008) is that all too often these exchanges and experiences reproduce dominant notions of cultural superiority. Intercultural dialogue is not really dialogue, but rather a form of reproduction of cultural domination.

Only when the exchange and the partnership is part of a broader process of learning and engagement with global issues and questions, and when it addresses questions of power and domination, can such experiences lead to a broader and more questioning global consciousness.

## **Global Skills as Skills for Making Sense and Engaging with the Globalised World**

The third lens through which you could see global skills is as an approach that recognises complexity and critical thinking and is linked closely to a values-based approach around social justice. Building on the work of Freire (1970) and Giroux (2005) this approach is based on recognition of an approach towards learning that is open, participatory but also deeply political including recognition of power. Giroux (2005) talks about critical pedagogy starting, not with test scores, but with questions. He states that it is also about recognising competing views and vocabularies and the opening up of new forms of knowledge and creative spaces.

This approach to global skills means the following:

- recognising the value of learning about different perspectives and approaches;
- equipping the learner with the skills to question and develop the ability to enquire about and reflect critically upon a range of social, economic and cultural influences;
- emphasising the importance of positive social engagement and of seeking solutions;
- recognising the impact of globalisation on people's lives and the need to equip them with the ability to make sense of a rapidly changing world;
- making reference to the forces that shape societal and economic change.

It includes recognition of concepts and approaches outlined in the first and second lenses outlined in this paper, but takes this to a new level in terms of critical thinking, understanding and valuing different perspectives and above all recognising the impact of globalisation on relations between people and communities around the world. It also acknowledges the consequential differentials in terms of power and access to resources and learning opportunities

These influences can be seen in the work of Lancashire Global Education Centre (2008) and the Development Education Association's (DEA, 2003) 'Global Learning for Global College' initiative.

A small voluntary organisation in Lancashire in England, the Lancashire Global Education Centre developed a three year programme for tutors in their local college linked to language skills, most notably for migrant communities where English was a second language. They did this through the production of resources and training materials that related their skills needs to their own experiences and global issues. Themes covered include Fairtrade, the Millennium Development Goals, What You Can Do and the Global Drugs Trade. (Lancashire Global Education Centre, 2009)

The Development Education Association (DEA), the umbrella body for promoting greater understanding of global and development issues in England, has produced a range of materials on the theme of global learning and skills for further education. Newell-Jones (2007) in one of its more recent publications notes the following:

That education and training for a global society should lead to the acquisition of skills is not in question. However unless this includes essential skills in critical engagement and also leads to the adoption of impact-orientated behaviours, learning will be ineffectual. (p. 5)

These two areas of including linkage to understanding of global issues and questions of critical engagement bring the global skills concept back to the impact of globalisation on a person's life and

how they make sense of the rapidly changing world around them—and have the confidence, knowledge and values-base to make a positive contribution to both the economy and society more widely.

These elements could be summarised as

- understanding what globalisation means, particularly in relation to the individual, their community and their employment;
- ability to understand and engage with global issues, such as climate change and poverty, in order to become a more informed and engaged citizen;
- development of skills to understand and respect a range of cultures and values and to be able to reflect critically upon one's own values base.

Similar perspectives can be seen in the work of Catteeuw (as cited in CEDEFOP—European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2008) a Flemish government advisor on skills, in his framework for intercultural competences for business purposes. His approach took account of the various traditions already mentioned in this paper on key skills including flexibility and empathy, communicative skills and cultural knowledge, but took it further to include openness to different views and solutions, and cultural awareness.

This broader perspective on global skills could be summarised as recognising the importance of generic skills of communication, team work, adaptability and respect for others, but in a context which recognises the nature of society, its cultural base, its rapidly changing economic forces and the challenges of dealing with the unknown. Key to the skills needs of the global society are skills that enable people to deal with complexity, uncertainty and insecurity (Bourn & Neal, 2008).

There is some evidence in England within further education of a desire to recognise this more person-centred learning, based on critical thinking perspectives, within strategies around global skills. One example is Regent's Park College in Leicester, England, which promotes itself as a Global Citizens' college. This outlook is summarised by the institution as follows:

The college is a diverse and successful learning community and this makes it the ideal setting to offer a broad education for global citizenship. Our students achieve excellent exam results and they also want to contribute to changing things for the better and to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to make a real difference in society. They develop skills of leadership, co-operation, communication, questioning, critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution. They learn to understand global, local and individual perspectives and to critically examine all points of view; in other words to be informed, skilled and active global citizens. (as cited in Bourn, 2008, p. 29).

Another example is City and Islington College in London, which has the global dimension as the first theme of its current strategic plan. This starts off by saying, "we want our students to play their roles as global citizens, to compete, interact and progress in a changing world", and ends with, "We celebrate and learn from the rich diversity of our students and this same diversity prepares them for life in a global society and work in a global economy" (City and Islington College, 2008, p. 3).

These two Colleges have implemented these strategies through providing openings and spaces for projects and initiatives on themes such as Black History month and Refugee Week, organised in a form to encourage a sense of celebrating diversity. But the way in which they promoted this diversity was one that moves beyond a traditional multi- or intercultural approach to one that locates learning within the context of globalisation, social change, understanding the causes of inequality and injustice, and what the learners can do themselves.

## **Taking the Interpretations Forward within Further Education and Training**

In the context of the UK there is discussion amongst a range of providers in further education through the work of bodies such as the Association of Colleges, British Council and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) that greater attention needs to be given by both policy-makers and practitioners to an approach towards skills that takes account of a social, cultural and economic dimensions and recognises the impact of globalisation must be seen as more than different technical skills. A framework was developed for LSIS (Bourn 2008) that attempts to note the economic and cultural perspectives but locates them within a broader more learning and global perspective. This framework is based on the following concepts:

- an ability to communicate with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds;
- an ability to work within teams of people from a range of backgrounds and other countries;
- openness to a range of voices and perspectives from around the world;
- willingness to resolve problems and seek solutions;
- recognition and understanding of the importance of global forces on people's lives;
- willingness to play an active role in society at local, national and international level (Bourn, 2008).

This framework aims above all to provide creative space for approaches towards learning that recognise and a range of voices and perspectives and promote a participatory and experiential methodology.

This approach towards critical skills builds on the work of Andreotti and de Souza (2008) in posing the need to move from fixed content and skills that conform to a predetermined idea of society, towards concepts and strategies that address complexity, difference and uncertainty. It also means moving from an approach to learning that accepts given knowledge, to one that questions and moves positions and views. Finally this approach means moving from a universalist and ordered view of the world to one that recognises complex, multifaceted and different means of interpretation (Bourn & Neal, 2008).

In terms of the impact particularly of this more radical and transformative approach towards global skills, it is possibly too early to say apart from the fact that a range of bodies from government to companies to training providers and non-governmental organisations have begun in the UK at least to continue dialogue and discussion on these themes.

However if one looks at the 2009 UK government policy statement on Skills for Growth (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009) the emphasis is on making sure the skills for the future are

linked to technological development and economic prosperity. The impact of skills development is seen within this strategy in terms of economic value to the employer and employability.

The challenges therefore for those supportive of a more critically pedagogical approach to global skills are to consider how best to use the creative spaces that do exist and to identify potential partners and alliances in order to encourage more innovation and practice that recognises different viewpoints and perspectives.

## Conclusion

This article has outlined the impact of globalisation on new approaches to the content and methodology of learning. It has suggested that the concept of global skills could be a way of promoting debates and different ways of interpreting the learning needs for a global society and a global economy. Through looking at how the term *global skills* has been interpreted within a UK context, it has identified three trends that underpin much of current policy and practice. These trends of economic, intercultural dialogue and understanding and critical global perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and combinations of all three can be seen in some programmes, activities and policy statements. For most policy-makers and some employers, the concept of global skills will be seen primarily as about equipping the learner with the skills to compete in a global economy. For bodies such as the British Council their approach would include valuing intercultural dialogue and experience. Finally for some non-governmental organisations it can also be seen as about providing openings and spaces for posing an approach to learning that challenges dominant modes of thinking and encourages creativity, differing perspectives and recognition of dominant power relations in society.

Whatever the different interpretations of global skills may be, what cannot be denied is that with the pre-eminence of globalisation, these debates will not go away. The debates take many forms but within them is a degree of consensus that globalisation poses challenges for education and learning, particularly in the areas addressed in this paper. Marquardt has talked about the need for a 'global mindset' and the need for people

to continually expand their knowledge, have a highly developed conceptual capacity to deal with the complexity of global organisations, are extremely flexible, strive to be sensitive to cultural diversity, are able to undertake decisions with adequate information and have a strong capacity for reflection. A person with a global mindset thinks and sees the world globally, is open to exchanging ideas and concepts across borders. (as cited in Jameson, 2006, p. 6)

The global skills agenda is here to stay. The issue is what does this entail and how the debates around global skills can provide openings and opportunities for a more creative approach to and the delivery of education.

## References

- Andreotti, V. & de Souza, L. M. (2008). Translating theory into practice and walking minefields: Lessons from the project 'Through Other Eyes'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 1(1), 23-36.

- Apple, M., Kenway, J. & Singh, M. (2005). *Globalising education-policies, pedagogies and politics*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Archer, W. (2005, April). *The global university: What are employers looking for?* Paper presented at conference of Development Education Association, London. Retrieved from [http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/dea/documents/h\\_dea\\_grads\\_as\\_global\\_cits.pdf](http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/dea/documents/h_dea_grads_as_global_cits.pdf)
- Beck, U. (2000). *What is globalisation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blum, N., Bourn, D. & Bentall, C. (2009). *Learning and skills for a global econom*. London: Learning and Skills Improvement Service.
- Bourn, D. (Ed.). (2008). *Development education: Debates and dialogues*. London: Bedford Way Papers.
- Bourn, D. & Neal, I. (2008). *The global engineer*. London: Engineers Against Poverty.
- Bourn, D & Sharma, N. (2008). Global and sustainability perspectives within engineering. *The Municipal Engineer*, 161(ME3), 199-205.
- Bourn, D. & Shiel, C. (2009). Global perspectives: Aligning agendas. *Environmental Education Research*, 15(6), 661-678.
- Brown, G. (2008, February 10). We will use our schools to break down class barriers. *The Observer*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/feb/10/gordonbrown.education>
- Burbules, N & Torres, C. (Eds.). (2000). *Globalization and education: Critical perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Caruana, V. & Spurling, N. (2007). *The Internationalisation of UK higher education: A review of selected material (Project Report)*. Retrieved from Higher Education Academy website: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/tla/lit\\_review\\_internationalisation\\_of\\_uk\\_he.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/tla/lit_review_internationalisation_of_uk_he.pdf)
- CEDEFOP—European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2008). *Future skills needs in Europe—Medium Term Forecast*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publication of the European Communities.
- Centre for Excellence in Leadership. (2007). *Leadership for globalisation*. London: Author.
- CILT—The National Centre for Languages. (2008). *National occupational standards for intercultural working standards for working with people from different countries or diverse cultures*. London: Author.
- City and Islington College. (2008). *Strategic plan 2008-11*. London: Author.
- Development Education Association. (2003). *Global success for all: A skills strategy in an unequal world*. London: Author.

- Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. (2009). *Skills for growth: The national skills strategy*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Department for Education and Skills. (2004). *Putting the world into world class education*, London: Author.
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. (2008). *Globalisation: Meeting the challenge*. London: Author.
- Edwards, R & Usher, R. (2008). *Globalisation and pedagogy*. London: Routledge.
- European Commission (2009). *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training: Indicators and benchmarks 2009*. Luxembourg: Author.
- European Union. (2006) *Key Competencies for lifelong learning* [Annex of recommendation published in *Official Journal of European Union* L394]. Retrieved from European Union website: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf)
- Fien, J., Maclean, R. & Park, M.-G. (Eds.). (2009). *Work, learning and sustainable development*. Bonn: Springer.
- France, A. (2007). *Understanding Youth in Late Modernity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H. (2005). *Border crossings*. New York: Routledge.
- Haahr, J. H. & Hansen, M. E. (2006). *Adult skills assessment in Europe: Feasibility study—Policy and business analysis* (Final report). Copenhagen: Danish Technological Institute.
- Her Majesty's Treasury. (2006). *Leitch Review of skills*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Hicks, D. & Holden, C. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching the global dimension*. London: Routledge/Falmer
- Jarvis, P. (2007). *Globalisation, lifelong learning and the learning society*. London: Routledge .
- Jameson, J. (Ed.). (2006). *Leadership practices in lifelong learning in a global society*, Retrieved from [http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/dea/documents/a\\_cel\\_project\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/dea/documents/a_cel_project_final_report.pdf)
- Jones, E. & Brown, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Internationalising higher education*. London: Routledge.
- Kenway, J. & Bullen, E. (2008). The global corporate curriculum and the young cyberflâneur as global citizen. In N. Dolby & F. Fizvi (Eds.), *Youth moves: Identities and education in global perspective*, pp. 15-32. New York: Routledge.
- Knight, J. (2003). Updating the Definition of International Higher Education. *International Higher Education*, Fall, 2-3.



- KPMG. (2008). *The global skills convergence: Issues and ideas for the management of an international workforce*. Retrieved from KPMG website:  
<http://www.kpmg.com/Global/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/The-global-skills-convergence.pdf>
- Lancashire Global Education Centre. (2008). *Global skills: Understanding the world through English*. Preston: Author.
- Lancashire Global Education Centre. (2009, January). *Global skills project: Embedding the Global Dimension into Skills for Life classes*. Retrieved from Lancashire Global Education Centre website: [http://www.eauc.org.uk/sorted/files/lgec\\_final.pdf](http://www.eauc.org.uk/sorted/files/lgec_final.pdf)
- Lasonen, J. (2009). Intercultural education: Promoting sustainability in education and training. In J. Fien, R. Maclean & M.-G. Park (Eds.), *Work, learning and sustainable development*, (pp. 187-202). Bonn: Springer.
- Learning and Skills Council. (2007). *Skills in England 2007, Volume 1: Key Messages*. Coventry, Learning and Skills Council
- Leney, T. (2004). *Achieving the Lisbon goal: The contribution of VET* (Final report 1-11-04). Luxemburg: European Commission.
- Leonard, A. (2008). Global school relationships: School linking and modern challenges. In D. Bourn (Ed.), *Development education: Debates and dialogues*. London: Bedford Way Papers.
- Martin, F. (2007). School linking: A controversial issue. In H. Claire & C. Holden (Ed.), *The challenge of teaching controversial issues*. Stoke-On Trent: Trentham Books.
- Morrow, R. & Torres, C. (2000). The state, globalisation and educational policy. In N. Burbules & C. Torres (Eds.), *Globalisation and education: Critical perspectives*, (pp. 27-56). New York: Routledge.
- Newell-Jones, K. (2007). *Global skills and lifelong learning*. London: Development Education Association.
- Newton, B., Hurtsfield, J., Miller, L., Page, R. & Akroyd, K. (2005). *What employers look for when recruiting the unemployed and inactive: Skills, characteristics and qualifications*, DWP Research Report, 295. London, Department of Work and Pensions.
- Ray, L. (2007). *Globalisation in everyday life*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rizvi, F. (2000). The production of global imagination. In N. Burbules & C. Torres (Eds.), *Globalisation and education: Critical perspectives*, (pp. 205-226). New York: Routledge.
- Rizvi, F. & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Schoorman, D. (2000). What really do we mean by internationalisation. *Contemporary Education*, 7(4), 1-7.

Suarez-Orozco, M. M. & Qin-Hilliard, D. B. (2004). *Globalisation: Culture and education in the new millennium*. Los Angeles: University of California.

Tormey, S. (2006). Living life on a global scale. *Research News*. Retrieved from <http://www.research.nottingham.ac.uk/NewsReviews/newsDisplay.aspx?id=293>

UNESCO. (2001). *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Retrieved from UNESCO website: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13179&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

Waters, M. (1995). *Globalisation*. London: Routledge.

Woodcock, M. (2006). *Greenwich community international strategy 2006-2009*. London: Greenwich Community College.