The Global Achievement Gap---The Finland Phenomenon

In his brilliant book *The Global Achievement Gap*, the author Tony Wagner argues that there is a huge disconnect between what potential employers are looking for in young people today (critical thinking skills, creativity, and effective communication) and what our schools are providing (passive learning environments and uninspired lesson plans that focus on test preparation and reward memorization. (8)

The global achievement gap as defined by Tony Wagner highlights “the gap between what even our best suburban, urban, and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what all students will need to succeed as learners, workers, and citizens in today’s global knowledge economy. (8)

Wagner astutely makes the point that “our system of public education-----our curricula, teaching methods, and the tests we require students to take—were created in different century for the needs of another era. They are hopelessly outdated. (9)

Furthermore, the Partnership for 21st Century skills agrees that understanding and appreciating diverse cultures are additional core competencies that all H.S. graduates need to master and thus has included “Global Awareness” in its “21st Century Skills Framework.”

According to the Partnership, Global Awareness refers to the ability of students to

- [use] 21st century skills
- [such as critical thinking and problem solving] to understand and address global issues.
- [learn] from and [work] collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts.
- [understand] other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages. (25)

People often ask the following questions:

Don’t high school graduates really need to know how to understand another culture or religion, rather than just speak a few phrases of a
second language or travel to another country on a study-abroad program for school credit?

Wagner clarifies that he is not asking that high school students should take courses in Modern China or Ancient Religions, although that would be fine. But [he] is more concerned about our kids knowing how to find and make sense of important information about other cultures. Wagner continues, “how many of our high school graduates today would know how to research the differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims? (27)

FYI- I also thought that I would share a blog review of *The Finland Phenomenon*, a documentary focused on Tony Wagner’s examination of the Finnish school system. This is a nice companion piece to the Linda Darling Hammond “Finnish First” video.


References: