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Fighting Ignorance of the Middle East and Islam: A Case Study of Generation Global in a Virginia Classroom

Caitriona Nam Hee Cobb

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Caitriona Nam Hee Cobb
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Caitriona Cobb
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A Case Study of Generation Global in a Virginia Classroom

Caitriona Cobb

Department of Political Science and International Affairs
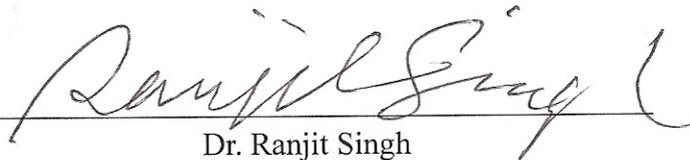University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

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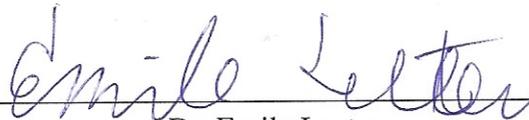
Dr. Emile Lester
Assistant Professor of Political Science
First Reader

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Dr. Ranjit Singh
Associate Professor of Political Science
Second Reader

Identification of the Problem: Importance of Education on the Middle East and Islam

At 4:42 pm on Friday January 27, President Trump signed an executive order. The ramifications were great. As stated by *The New York Times,* it "indefinitely barred Syrian refugees from entering the United States, suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days and blocked citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries, refugees or otherwise, from entering the United States for 90 days: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen."[1] The threat of terrorism, which for many has become synonymous with Islamist extremism, has made some Americans less welcoming to citizens from countries whose people are predominantly Muslim. The order sparked opposition on many levels, including the college one. On Monday, January 30, 2017, students at the University of Mary Washington met from 8:00pm to 8:30pm for a Silent Protest Against Trump's Ban on Muslim Immigrants. However despite the numerous public demonstrations, at least one poll revealed that more Americans than expected supported the order, and others showed significant support for the measure.[2]

This support is linked to a limited knowledge or biased view of Muslim-majority countries, especially those that are in the Middle East. As PBS identifies on a webpage on stereotypes on the Middle East and Islam, people associate Islam with violence, think all Arabs are Muslim, and think that Muslims are fundamentally different and cannot adapt to Western life. These ideas have their roots in Orientalism, which justified many colonialist actions for

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[1] Liam Stack. "Trump's Executive Order on Immigration: What We Know and What We Don't." *The New York Times,* January 29, 2017. Accessed February 14, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/29/us/trump-refugee-ban-muslim-executive-order.html.

[2] Scott Clement. "Americans are more split on the Trump travel ban than you might think." *The Washington Post,* February 13, 2017. Accessed February 14, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/02/13/americans-arent-rejecting-trumps-immigration-ban-outright-but-it-has-a-tough-road-ahead/?utm_term=.4fb9da8b3882.

Europeans in the past and still persist today.[3] Those who support Trump's executive order are afraid that immigrants from these Muslim–majority countries are dangerous and linked to terrorism, which lines up with the stereotype of the violent Muslim. These biases and gaps in knowledge are dangerous for future decisions that America will make in regards to foreign policy. The question of what decides the support for policy decisions is a multifactor problem, but knowledge gained from education likely plays a large role since it is a part of a person's political and civil socialization and school teaches people how to engage in society.[4]

These gaps in knowledge are detrimental in light of the importance of the Middle East. Historically, it is the birthplace of monotheistic religions and today is strategically relevant to the US because it contains a rich source of oil. In 2006, the US policy trajectory already included a future tied to Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other states in the region. This is no surprise considering the fact that the Middle East is a flashpoint for a myriad of conflicts, most infamously the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, the invasion of Iraq and the threat of terrorism following 9/11.[5] The current day- picture is no different and has expanded to include more concerns. Some examples are the terrorist group ISIS, the Syrian civil war, and the ensuing refugee crisis, which has pulled the Western World further into the complicated situation.[6] The rise of ISIS and several high-profile terrorist attacks[7] have now increased the fear surrounding Muslim people and misunderstanding of Islam. Proper education on the topics is therefore even

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[3]"Common Western Perceptions about Islam and the Middle east." PBS. 2002. Accessed April 27, 2017. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/types/index.html?pagewanted=all.

[4]Gordon, H. R., and J. K. Taft. "Rethinking Youth Political Socialization: Teenage Activists Talk Back." *Youth & Society* 43, no. 4 (2010): 1499-527. doi:10.1177/0044118x10386087.

[5]Khodadad Kaviani. "Teachers' Gatekeeping of the Middle East Curriculum." (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2007), 3.

[6]John Cassidy. "America's Vital Interests in Syria." *The New Yorker*, November 3, 2015, Accessed November 6, 2016. http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/americas-vital-interests-in-syria.

[7]Nash Jenkins, "A Timeline of Recent Terrorist Attacks in Europe." *Time*, December 19, 2016.

more vital.

Kaviani and Mccain explain the consequences of this problem remaining unresolved in their study of how educators teach about the Iraq War. "When the political climate is saturated with mistrust and animosity, fear of the "other" can override our sense of judgment and make us agree to policies that may not be based on facts." This is concerning since many of the high risk situations in the Middle East have long lasting ramifications. The pair goes on to cite a 2007 study by John Jost of New York University and his colleagues that found that all political groups, for a brief time at least, become more conservative when thinking about death.[8] In crisis situations like 9/11, the shadow of death is all too present and people's fear of death spreads to groups of people they hold responsible, the "other" that Kaviani and Mccain reference. Since the U.S. does not want bad foreign policies to be enacted in this hazy, fear driven state, this country should put more emphasis on education on topics that could help prevent this 'othering' of groups like Muslims.

From this research the following relationship is inferred: Good educational practices on the topics of the Middle East and Islam lead to more knowledgeable citizens which then lead to more tolerant, better informed citizens that can better interpret relevant U.S. foreign policy decisions and act accordingly. Although this study cannot show the relationship between education and voting practices because of its limitations, it is inferred that more knowledgeable citizens will then make an effort to influence their local policymakers by voting, protesting, or other actions to make their opinion visible about U.S. foreign policy choices in the Middle East and in regards to Islamic countries. Without this basis of knowledge, foreign policy decisions could be influenced by citizens acting out of fear and be made hastily or without reliable

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[8]Khodadad Kaviani and Terrence Mccain. "Five Teachers' Range of Views on the Iraq War." *JCIE Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* 5, no. 1 (2010). doi:10.20355/c5z301, 14.

evidence.

Because of this proposed relationship and the need for informed, tolerant citizens on these subjects, this research endeavors to find what good educational practices about the Middle East and Islam should look like. The researcher wished to evaluate strategies that organizations are currently using to improve education instead of adding to the literature on what is missing in the curriculum. In the initial research, a unique program called Generation Global stood out because it included several components that are pointed to as relevant practices in the literature on the topic such as the promotion of intercultural dialogue and teaching about religion. The research is centered around observing the effects that this program has on the students and if it is useful in creating informed, tolerant citizens on the Middle East and Islam. To do this, an observational case study was completed on the impact of Generation Global in a Comparative World Religions Classroom in Virginia.

This paper will first outline the literature that reveals the current state of education on the Middle East and Islam and explain the components that would be useful to include in a successful program on the Middle East and Islam. Next, it will give background on Generation Global, weighing the possible benefits and limitations of the program. Then, the hypotheses, operationalized concepts, limitations, and methodology will be explained. Next, the results will be illustrated of both the observations and interviews. Lastly, these results will be interpreted and final conclusions will be made.

Literature Review:

The Insufficient Teaching Methods Currently Used

Although the Middle East and the religion of Islam boast rich histories and cultures, the importance of the Middle East was not emphasized in schools until after the attack on 9/11.

Teachers began seeing the importance of the region after the fact. The Associate Director of the Middle East Resource Center, Felicia Hecker, reported that she observed a pronounced increase in the number of teachers calling to ask for teaching resources on the Middle East after the disastrous event.[9] Still, the educational materials are not comprehensive and leave much to be desired in giving students an accurate and comprehensive look at the area. This topic is broached in scholarly articles and several doctoral theses of education. These researchers agree that there are significant gaps and biases in both general study about and specific issues related to the Middle East.

In his 2007 doctoral thesis, Khodadad Kaviani studied teachers' curriculum selection of Middle Eastern topics in high school and how the current conflicts influenced the teachers' content selection. Kaviani selected ten teachers who teach social studies in secondary public school. He protects the identities of the participants so the locations of the schools are not named, but he provides some information about each. They shared the subject they taught, the Middle East, but differed in the location of their schools (urban vs. rural), gender, the amount of training they had received about the region, and socio-economic status. He conducted initial interviews, surveyed all ten teachers, and then completed in-depth interviews with five of them.[10] The topics he examined were the Iraq War, the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, Political Islam, Terrorism, and the Nuclear Middle East.[11]According to Kaviani, teachers are uncomfortable teaching about the region partially because of the controversy surrounding the 2003 Iraq war. He cites a statistic stating that, "about six in 10 voters disapproved of the Iraq war and only a third believed it had

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[9]Kaviani,"Teachers' Gatekeeping,", 6.
[10] Kaviani,"Teachers' Gatekeeping," 68-69.
[11] Kaviani,"Teachers' Gatekeeping," 7.

improved long-term security in the United States."[12] The discontent of a majority of the

American people makes the conflict difficult to talk about. This could then make teacher's

choices in curriculum selection biased or geared towards avoiding the issue. Kaviani is generally

concerned with how teachers are selecting topics, seeking to understand "the reasons why some

teachers included topics like Islam, veiling for women, [and] suicide bombings..," while some

included others.[13] He found that teachers use mostly domestic media to teach about the Middle

East, that Islam is taught in the context of terrorism, and that over half of the ten teachers studied

found teaching about the Middle East to be stressful since recent US actions in the region are

controversial.[14]

In the end, Kaviani makes several suggestions for the future of the teaching on these

subjects. The first is that both teachers and students need to explore a combination of new

sources from both domestic and foreign media to get a balanced point of view on issues.[15] The

other five implications are focused on teacher education. They include making "curriculum

materials written at a reading level appropriate for their students,[16]" encouraging "teachers [to

pay] attention to viewpoints that are present and absent from the materials they use as

curriculum,"[17] developing "a disciplined approach to teach about religions and the role they have

played in the development of civilizations and conflicts around the world,"[18] doing "a thorough

examination of all political systems operating in the Middle East and their supporters…"[19] and

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[12]Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 7.
[13] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 8-9.
[14] Kaviani,"Teachers' Gatekeeping," 188-199.
[15] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 190.
[16] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 195.
[17] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 195-196.
[18]Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 196.
[19]Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 196.

"better [preparing] future teachers so they do not feel uninformed about the Middle East."[20]

Similar to Kaviani's research, Gregory Delahanty's study of world history textbooks used in secondary schools published between 2008 and 2011 investigated how the authors presented Islam, the post-Ottoman Middle East, and the new states that developed after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The results revealed that all four of the textbooks analyzed lacked a comprehensive view of Islam, strongly favored Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and that many of the Middle Eastern nations only had two sentences written about them if there was anything at all. [21] For example, many researchers found errors or omissions in sections written about Islam in world history textbooks. Delhanty cites Sewell's finding that Sharia law is described as "an alternative legal system" in a textbook without any additional information and Douglass and Dunn's finding that textbook descriptions of Muhammad's life had errors that can be attributed to an Orientalist viewpoint.[22] These omissions and errors could be changing the way the students reading them perceive Islam in a negative manner.

A narrower focus on just the Iraq war yielded similar results. Kaviani teamed up with Terrance McCain in 2010 to study what American teachers are teaching about the Iraq war. Some students revealed that this war is almost never examined in class, which can be problematic and lead to an indifferent attitude about the event. [23]This is understandable considering the vast obstacles that teachers face when talking about controversial topics, especially in wars like this one. Kaviani and McCain go on to explain that most teachers wish to teach the conflict in a balanced way but are unsure of what opposing viewpoints are and are not

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[20]Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 197.
[21] Gregory Delahanty. "The Post-Ottoman Middle East in Modern World History Textbooks". (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2014), 109-115.
[22]Delhanty, "The Post-Ottoman," 34.
[23]Kaviani and Mccain,6-7.

appropriate to provide a balanced scope of ideas. The question of whether to use exclusively American news sources or viewpoints from other countries like Iraq and Jordan is at the heart of this confusion.[24] These difficult questions make it understandable that many teachers decide not to even address these topics.

Due to the dearth of good resources, many teachers turn towards media sources to fill the gaps. Yet, this can be dangerous. Dr. Liz Jackson points out the importance of media literacy in her doctoral thesis on teaching about Muslims after September 11th and further explicates her points in an article on the images of Islam in American media and its effects on education. In the former, she analyzes different sources of media, including several movies. One of her analyses is of the flick *Crash,* which features an Iranian American family. It challenges the assumption that Persians are Arabs but still portrays the main character Farhad as "irrational and violent,"[25] which plays into the stereotype of the violent, reactionary Muslim. From findings like this, she concludes that media sources are very biased in their representations of Islam and Muslims, and that educational materials are only marginally better because of their narrow scope and non-contemporary focus.[26] In the latter, she calls for a vibrant discussion of contentious issues to explore both sides of the matter and to teach critical media literacy, because media tends to focus on the extraordinary cases that perpetuate the stereotypical image of Muslims as terrorists. She recommends that critical media literacy be "thematic, analytical, and critical,"[27] exploring many different images of the subject so that one can develop a "critical, independent, and informed

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[24] Kaviani and Mccain, 7.

[25] Elizabeth Jeanne Jackson. "Teaching about Controversial Groups in Public Schools: Critical Multiculturalism and the Case of Muslims since September 11" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009), 106.

[26] Jackson. "Teaching about Controversial Groups," 121.

[27] Jackson. "Teaching about Controversial Groups in Public Schools, 17.

opinion"[28] that acknowledges that media representations are created from a divergence of people's actions and should not be used to essentialize a group.[29] In sum, the overwhelming message points to a need for better, balanced coverage of Islam and the Middle East in America's educational system. Students would benefit from hearing both sides of contentious issues like the Iraq war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and generally more coverage of Middle Eastern countries' geography, history, and culture since many countries get barely two sentences in a textbook, if that.

What Makes a Successful Education Program?

The majority of the research outlined above on teaching about the Middle East and Islam indicates that there are gaps in the educational practices and provides an idea on what a better model might look like. However no successful model has been completed yet. Consequently, it is crucial to continue to research which methods will best serve to improve these educational practices and to find what a balanced, solid education on these topics would look like. There are also a plethora of studies that suggest solutions to the problems that Kaviani, Jackson and others raise. A successful educational program should address controversial issues and religion and include civic education, critical media literacy, and intercultural dialogue.

First, it is important to acknowledge a factor that inhibits balanced teaching, but is necessary for scholarship on the Middle East and Islam. The fear of controversy is a serious obstacle to wide-scale changes in public education. Nonetheless, studies show the worth of studying issues that people find contentious. In her study on the inclusion of controversial issues

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[28]Jackson. "Teaching about Controversial Groups in Public Schools, 17.

[29] Liz Jackson. "Images of Islam in US Media and Their Educational Implications." *Educational Studies* 46, no. 1 (2010): 171, 216. doi:10.1080/00131940903480217. 17-19.

in democratic education, Diana Hess cites that discussion of complex policy issues increases the development of tolerant attitudes and knowledge.[30] Tolerance is central to a productive democracy so that both the majority and the minorities have fair representation. This is vital when applied to study of the Middle East and Islam since so many negative stereotypes are perpetuated about them. If students never learn how to discuss such issues, they will likely remain ignorant and uncaring about a representative image of Muslims, Arabs, and other inhabitants of the Middle East. For example, a person that has not been taught the faults in the stereotype about Muslims all being violent could ostracize all Muslims in their community as a result and exclude them from economic and social opportunities. Teaching about controversial topics is also important because the core of democracy is based on deliberation, accepting a divergence of opinions into the decision making process so that no one power dominates.[31] Ironically, the inclusion of controversy in education is controversial in itself because teachers may be perceived as promoting one position. People outside of the classroom could then incorrectly identify certain lessons as indoctrination. Issues seen as provocative are difficult for teachers to present.

Hess cites four approaches to controversial issues in curriculum: denial, privilege, avoidance, and balance. With denial, the educator approaches it as a non-controversial issue and claims that there is a correct answer to the question. With privilege, the teacher recognizes the controversy but promotes a certain view. With avoidance, the teacher completely skips over the controversy because of discomfort with the topic. With a balanced approach the teacher teaches

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[30] Diana E. Hess. "Controversies about Controversial Issues in Democratic Education." *Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 02 (2004): 257-61. doi:10.1017/s1049096504004196.

[31] Hess, "Controversies about Controversial Issues," 257.

the issue as controversial and presents a variety of different positions.[32] The goal is for the

teacher to use a balanced approach. However, as evidenced above, the teaching of the Middle

East often falls under the privilege and avoidance categories. Students need a balanced approach

to gain the most from the lessons on the subject so that they can form their own educated

opinions. To do this, teachers need resources from sources that can provide opinions from a

diversity of sources and have an open, respectful dialogue about the difference between them.

Teachers need appropriate academic sources of other country's opinions to prevent the issue

from being seen as too controversial to broach.

Although many people see religion as controversial, some scholars have promulgated the

view that teaching about religion is both constitutional and necessary. For example, Charles

Haynes, the director of the Religious Freedom Center, talks about how teaching about religion is

not indoctrination but that the lessons must be "objective, academic, and age appropriate" to

prevent miscommunications. Haynes also mentions how schools must prepare their teachers to

teach about religions in constitutional ways so that controversies do not happen.[33] Teachers need

support to successfully implement these lessons to ensure that the study is purely academic, and

that the community is also aware of the scholarly nature of the study.

Similarly, the study of religion is generally vital to a well-rounded education. In Warren

Nord's *Does God Make a Difference,* he argues for teaching about religion and shows that most

state standards and textbooks ignore religion. A broad liberal education including religion is

necessary for critical thinking and understanding of other subjects such as literature, history, and

current events. The bible is referenced in countless works of literature, religion played a central

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[32] Hess," Controversies about Controversial Issues," 258-9.
[33] Charles Haynes, "Islam, Public Schools, and the Challenge of Teaching about Religions." Newseum
Institute. Accessed September 24, 2016. http://www.newseuminstitute.org/2015/11/12/islam-public-schools-and-
the-challenge-of-teaching-about-religions/.

role in many historical events, and the future will continue to be shaped by this institution. Nord actually directly addresses the importance of learning about Islam in particular. He says, "In our post 9-11 world, the idea that students need to understand something about Islam if they are to understand politics and world affairs strikes most people as reasonable."[34] It is perfectly logical for the future generation to understand current day issues and happenings. This goes along with Kent Greenawalt's description of how primary and secondary educations have grown more secular as they became more public. However, he agrees that religion is still relevant and discusses how to approach religion in relation to particular topics such as economics, literature and science.[35] Generally, Greenawalt's views echo those of Nord and Haynes on the constitutionality and necessity of careful implementation of education on religion in schooling. There is also evidence that the public does not understand as much as it should about Islam in particular. In her dissertation on teaching Islam in public school, Najwa Aown cites a 2011 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Poll that found that "about half of the respondents viewed Islam as more likely to encourage violence" ten years after 9/11 despite reports that "about two-thirds of the public had little to no knowledge of Islam".[36] She describes how these prejudices may make it difficult for teachers to present the material in a balanced way since people already hold biased opinions of the religion. This makes the teaching of Islam more vital to understanding current events to prevent this negative attention to the religion.

 Religion is also an essential part of culture, which people need to understand to be knowledgeable about the people who live in a region and to reveal the truth about all the

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[34] Warren A, Nord, *Does God Make a Difference?: Taking Religion Seriously in Our Schools and Universities.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107.

[35] Kent Greenwalt, *Does God Belong in Public Schools?* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 13.

[36] Najwa M. Aown, "A place for informal learning in teaching about religion: The story of an experienced non-Muslim teacher and her learning about Islam." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27, no. 8 (2011): 1255-264. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011.07.005. 26-27.

stereotypes perpetuated by society. Other countries are already working to better incorporate this cultural teaching into their schools. In 2013, Professor Robert Jackson of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick wrote about a Council of Europe initiative to encourage schools to add a scholastic study of religion to intercultural education.[37] This is not a purely top-down movement; students also recognize the importance of a study of religion. The European Commission funded a research project to provide empirical evidence from the youth for the need and desire for such an initiative called ReDCo. The findings show that students hope for "peaceful coexistence across differences" and that this is possible through "knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews and sharing common interests as well as doing things together."[38] Teaching about religion and exposing students to many cultures is essential for developing tolerance and fighting bias and bigotry to promote religious freedom for all.

Teaching about religion and controversy are also important parts of civic education, but the term encompasses much more, including understanding the overall workings of the American government both domestically and overseas and its relationships with other countries. In earlier years, scholars believed that increased civic participation and voluntary association could serve as a panacea to the country's lack of citizen participation and understanding of the government's workings. Both the Galston and Theiss-Morse and Hibbing studies refute part of this claim, saying that civic participation is not enough to support a healthy democracy. Theiss-Morse show that voluntary associations are not enough on their own because they are not diverse, that they

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[37] Robert Jackson. "Learning about Religions and Beliefs: Developments in European Policy and Practice." Report. April 2, 2013. Accessed December 10, 2016. http://www.theewc.org/Content/Library/Conference-papers/Papers-presentations/Learning-about-Religions-and-Beliefs-Developments-in-European-Policy-and-Practice. 1.

[38] Jackson, "Learning about Religions," 2-3.

sometimes cause people to decide not to participate in political matters, and that not all groups promote democratic values.[39] In reference to the problems with Islamophobia today, such groups could easily develop a harmful anti-Muslim sentiment. However, there is a possible solution that could work in raising political knowledge and engagement. Galston promulgates the idea that society also needs civic education to raise political knowledge and political engagement and is therefore necessary for democracy. Civic knowledge helps people understand the political interests of individuals and groups, increases the consistency of views on issues over time, helps people understand political events, and helps prevent fear driven by ignorance.[40] Thus, it is important for students to learn the political interests of both Muslims and those in the Middle East and develop a more tolerant, informed attitude towards the people. It could also help people gain more informed views on issues in the Middle East like those concerning ISIS and refugees from the Middle East. The teaching of civic knowledge is one more tool that could help improve education.

Critical media literacy is another very important aspect of teaching the Middle East and Islam since the images of the religion and the people that reside in the region are overwhelmingly negative and misguided. As referenced above, Dr. Jackson strongly pushes for the need to distance oneself from the singular framing of topics and peoples that media tends towards and to use different sources to form one's own independent opinion. Teachers need to use more than just a textbook and include different mediums with different opinions. [41] This is true for other forms of mediums of media as well since it has a highly pervasive influence on

[39]Elizabeth Theiss-Morse and John R. Hibbing. "Citizenship And Civic Engagement." *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2005): 227. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104829.

[40]William Galston. "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (June 2001): 217-26. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.217.

[41] Jackson,"Images of Islam in US Media and Their Educational Implications."

young minds. Luke Rodesiler's article, "Empowering Students through Critical Media Literacy: This Means War," promotes a strong desire to protect students from the media messages that are increasingly coming in forms that "blur distinctions between genres."[42] His example of this trend is a commercial for the U.S. Army National Guard that takes the form of a music video. It blends a commercial with a video, which may make a person less likely to analyze it as it should and see that it is trying to sell something, participation in the National Guard. He promotes a particular model for critical media literacy called MAPS that asks students to look at the mode, audience, purpose, and situation to look more closely at the motivations and images used in media. This "blurring of genres" is definitely true for shaping people's opinions on the Middle East and Islam as there are Muslims and Middle Eastern people portrayed in a variety of media forms such as popular TV shows and movies that have deeper messages and meanings that are not visible on the surface.

Lastly, it is very useful for students to be global citizens and be engaged in intercultural dialogue. [43] Kaviani actually suggested that further research should be done on schools that connect high school students in America with those in the Middle East in 2007 thesis. The Council of Economic Europe has recognized the need for new tools to manage the increasing diversity in Europe in their White Paper on intercultural dialogue. It is important to maintain three things: pluralism, tolerance, and broadmindedness. However, intercultural dialogue can do even more according to this publication. [44] Intercultural dialogue is defined as "a process that

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[42] Luke Rodesiler,. "Empowering Students Through Critical Media Literacy: This Means War." *Clearing House* 83, no. 5 (July 2010): 164-167. *Education Research Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed April 6, 2017). 164

[43] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping," 198.

[44] Council of Europe. Ministers of Foreign Affairs. White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue; "Living Together As Equals in Dignity". May 08, 2008. Accessed December 11, 2016. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white_paper_final_revised_en.pdf, 13.

comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect."[45] One of its recommendations is to use this type of open dialogue about "all world religions and their beliefs and history" in primary and secondary schools because it is important to "prepar[e] young people for life as active citizens" in order to "introduce[e] respect for human rights as the foundation for managing diversity and stimulating openness to other cultures" and prevent prejudice.[46] This is especially relevant for the Middle East, because of the above-mentioned lack of proper education on these topics. In *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum agrees that introducing other world cultures should start early, and suggests that children engage in storytelling of things like Hindu myths and African folktales, to start exposure and dialogue about other non Western traditions at a young age and help form "sympathetic understanding of distant cultures."[47] This could also be applied to stories of Muhammad and the start of Islam. Intercultural dialogue is an integral piece in getting a sense of the culture of other nations, which ties into the importance of learning about religion and the everyday lives of the people in other parts of the world.

There are already multiple efforts to change or supplement the current system. Although they may not include all of the characteristics outlined above, they are developing new unique ways to better integrate students into being productive well-informed citizens about the Middle East and Islam. Some notable ones include the Choices Program, Project Look Sharp, and Generation Global. The first is run out of Brown University with curriculum tied to controversial

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[45] Council of Europe, 17.
[46] Council of Europe, 30-31.
[47] Martha Craven, Nussbaum, *Cultivating humanity: a classical defense of reform in liberal education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 69.

issues that helps students understand history by having them simulate making the difficult choices in historical events. It has modules on relevant topics like Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and terrorism.[48] The second is an organization out of Ithaca College that focuses on teaching media decoding skills. In 2006, the project released a kit specifically geared towards the Middle East that is promoted as providing a balanced teaching of controversial issues and events so that users can reconsider their prior images about the region and the people.[49] The third is using some of these tools to tackle ignorance and promote tolerance using intercultural dialogue with a religious bent. Although the Choices Program actively discusses controversial issues and Project Look Sharp teaches critical media literacy, Generation Global was ultimately selected since it exhibits two of the proposed important pieces in the model program to create informed, tolerant citizens on the Middle East and Islam.

Generation Global

Generation Global, formerly known as Face to Faith, is a program run out of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, which was formerly referred to as the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. When the program was created, the foundation's mission was to "provide practical support to counter religious conflict and extremism to promote open minded and stable societies" and to counter the negative effects of terrorism. As the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the program now says it is dedicated to "making globalization work for the many, not the few" and seeks to tackle "extremism which stops the co-existence and cultural open-mindedness

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[48] "About The Choices Program." About the Program | Brown University. Accessed April 27, 2017. http://www.choices.edu/about/.

[49] Chris Sperry. "Seeking Truth in the Social Studies Classroom: Media Literacy, Critical Thinking and Teaching about the Middle East." *Social Education* 70, no. 1 (January 1, 2006), 37-43.

essential for social integration."[50] The rhetoric has changed a bit, but the institution still looks to fight closed-mindedness and extremism. The Tony Blair Faith foundation used research from the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics to lead projects and develop tools for educators and other leaders in this field. One of these projects was Generation Global, a videoconferencing effort between various countries to promote intercultural dialogue in public schools across the world.[51] The program comes from an organization, whose purpose is to create more informed citizens through the education system.

As background to the program, Generation Global was first developed from a nine-month international research consultation with more than fifty educational experts around the globe.[52] It was first implemented in US Classrooms in 2009[53] and is designed for 12-17 year olds across the globe. It is currently active in 20 countries around the world,[54] seven of which are in the Middle East, including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine, and the UAE. The program is also widespread throughout the US and was used in 200 public and private schools in 2014.[55] For students, it seeks to provide the chance to learn how to have respectful, meaningful dialogue on difficult issues and connects them with students from other countries through videoconferences

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[50] "MAKING GLOBALISATION WORK FOR THE MANY." Tony Blair Institute. Accessed April 28, 2017. http://institute.global/making-globalisation-work-many.

[51] "About the Foundation." Tony Blair Faith Foundation. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/foundation.

[52] Simmi Kher. "Face to Faith: A School Programme by Tony Blair Faith Foundation Promoting Respect and Understanding." Report. 2012. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/apeid/Conference/16thConference, 6.

[53] Marcia Beauchamp. "Face to Faith: Teaching Global Citizenship." Phi Delta Kappan 93, no. 4 (2011): 24-27. doi:10.1177/003172171109300406, 25.

[54] "How It Works | Generation Global." How It Works | Generation Global. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://generation.global/how-it-works.

[55] Charles C. Haynes, "Face to Faith: Students Engaging Students across the Globe." Phi Delta Kappa (blog), May 20, 2014. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://pdkintl.org/blogs/learning-on-the-edge/face-to-faith-students-engaging-students-across-the-globe/.

or online connections.[56]The program also seeks to enable students to learn about religions and cultures by exposing them "to the way in which the major religious traditions of the world approach global concerns."[57] The program also provides support for teachers such as a toolset to manage team activities and work flow, modules that can be incorporated into the curriculum, workshops, and professional development on videoconferencing. The Tony Blair Foundation provides all the resources for the program for free.[58]

Simmi Kher, an educational leader and consultant with The Tony Blair Faith Foundation explains the goals of the project in her 2012 report. The report has a lot of good information but it is obviously highly subjective since Kher was a consultant for the foundation. She reports that the teaching style gets away from the classic teacher-student interaction, allowing for other teaching methods. She says that Global Generation lets students from different faiths and cultures speak directly to each other, learning from other people their age instead of solely from teachers. In the same vein, she proposed that it encourages asking questions and driving their own education rather than just pushing facts on the students.[59] The unique teaching style could be highly successful, but there are some possible downsides to this. The students speaking may not be representative of their culture and students may not be informed about the political events and policies of their culture. For students, Generation Global works to teach students how to have respectful, meaningful intercultural dialogues, tries to enrich religious literacy, helps students become global citizens, addresses stereotypes, and helps develop students' self esteem and emotional intelligence.[60] It also strives to provide a neutral perspective, which could be the

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[56] "How It Works | Generation Global."
[57] Haynes, Face to Faith.
[58] "How It Works | Generation Global."
[59] Kher, 6.
[60] Kher, 7.

balanced approach that is needed for these touchy subjects. It reportedly does not promote any particular religion and seeks to engender awareness and tolerance between participants in different communities.[61]The program also allows for study of specific issues apart from the teaching of the practices of religious beliefs, values, and opinions. Some of the topics covered are charity, poverty and wealth, the environment, the art of expression, hunger and disease, and human rights.[62] The foundation also offers a lot of support for the teachers who do these videoconferences in their classrooms. It helps train and support teachers in their use of the videoconferencing technology as well as hosting teacher training workshops, teaching modules and lesson plans, a set of proposed social action projects for students, moderators to facilitate the videoconferences, and managers for the secure online community where students can dialogue.[63] All of the supposed effects and proponents of Generation Global sound highly encouraging, but are only helpful if they are truly effective.

There have been several evaluations of the program as a whole. According to Simmi Kher, the University of Warwick completed an evaluation of the project based on both qualitative and quantitative data in the U.K. with positive results.[64] Janet Bordelon also identified positive feedback for the Generation Global in her piece, "Religion Knows No Boundaries," but also had a couple of suggestions for its future development. She notes that the role of the teacher is a ambiguous since it does not give guidance on how much personal information is acceptable for them to share, that there is no suggestions for assessment to motivate students, that the program is English-only, and that students may feel they can opt out of videoconferences for fear

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[61] Kher, 6.
[62] Kher,6.
[63] Kher, 6.
[64] Kher, 8.

of negative feedback from fellow students. [65] Adding on to the suggestions that Bordelon gives, the researcher also has concerns about whether this program is enough exposure since each videoconference only last a single class period and whether the University of Warwick would have different results in a narrower field like education on the Middle East and Islam in US public high schools.

Still, despite these possible limitations, Generation Global is an ideal subject to perform an in-depth study to look at what methods are effective in improving public education on Islam and the Middle East. The premises of this program are cultural exposure, intercultural dialogue, and promoting tolerance. In addition, it operates in a lot of Middle Eastern countries, likely because of the goal of countering misconceptions about extremism. This study will endeavor to determine what resources can be supplemented to create the well-rounded educated students about the Middle East and Islam if the videoconferences are insufficient for the class and the program. In evaluating the Generation Global program, this research will also be able to shed some light on what portions of the proposed education plan are vital and what is still missing.

Hypotheses

The current findings point to the fact that a solid education on the Middle East and Islam should include both contentious topics and general topics that cover the basics of the region and the religion. The former would include an open, respectful dialogue on topics like the negative stereotypes of Muslims and Middle Easterners as well as a focus on media literacy to show students that there are opposing opinions on controversial issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the same vein, it would also help correct negative stereotypes of Americans held by

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[65] Janet Bordelon, "Religion Knows No Boundaries." *Religion in the Public Schools: Negotiating the New Commons*. N.p.: R&L Education , 2013. N. pag. Print,141.

those in the Middle East. The latter would include religion, geography, history, culture such as art and social norms, and endeavor to reveal the normal, everyday people of the region and religion. Thus the hypotheses for the success of the Generation Global are the following.

1a) Since Generation Global is more focused on the second portion of the proposed education model, it will be moderately successful in shifting notions and creating informed, tolerant citizens on the region of the Middle East and the religion of Islam.

1b) Since the inclusion of contentious topics and critical analysis of the Middle East and Islam is not built into this program, the education will not be complete. This moderate success can be measured by acts of passive tolerance and active searches for more information but may not include acts of active tolerance.

2) Generation Global's success, or the development of informed citizens on the region and religion, will vary greatly depending on the school it is implemented in since there are so many other variables to account for such as the teachers, the diversity of the school, and the curriculum the county promulgates.

Operationalizing Concepts

To ensure that the hypotheses proposed are fully understood, certain terms will be defined and operationalized before the proposed research process is outlined. These concepts are the Middle East and what an informed, tolerant citizen on the Middle East and Islam consists of. The Middle East is a term with Western origins as it refers to the position of the region in relation to Great Britain. It was used to designate the area between the "Far East" and the "Near East" as a British imperial interest and is thought to have been officially coined by Captain Alfred Mahan of the US Navy in 1902. Today, the geography of the area is ambiguous and

although a core set of states is always included (Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq), the rest of the states included in maps of the region vary greatly.[66] For this research, a definition of the region provided by the Choices Program run out of Brown University will be used. According to this definition, the Middle East includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus, Turkey, and Syria. Nicholas Jensen chose this definition in his likeminded thesis on the portrayal of the region in social studies programs. Because of the Choices Program's educational bent, it seemed to be the most appropriate for this context as well.[67] It is also important to note that although many Muslims live in the Middle East, the region is neither exclusively Muslim nor the area that hosts the country where the most concentrated number of Muslims reside. The country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia with 13 percent of the total.[68]

The characteristics of an informed, tolerant citizen on the Middle East and Islam are difficult to define since it is unreasonable to expect a person to be an expert, but the level the citizen must reach is not certain. For this research the person must fulfill the following qualifications to be considered an informed, tolerant citizen related to the topic. The person should be able to recognize where the region is on a map, be able to converse intelligently and respectfully about the current events related to the region, know the flaws of the stereotypes of the region and religion, and have a general sense of its history, culture, geography, and social norms. Most importantly, such a citizen must be open to new knowledge and accepting of

[66]Karen Culcasi,. "Constructing And Naturalizing The Middle East." *Geographical Review* 100, no. 4 (2010): 583-97. doi:10.1111/j.1931-0846.2010.00059.x. 585,589

[67]Jenkins, Nicolas C. *Teaching the Middle East in Portland Public High Schools*. Master's thesis, Portland State University , 2016. Portland: Portland state University, 2016, 3.

[68]"Demographics of Islam." Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. Accessed February 15, 2017. https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-islam.

differences.[69] Generation Global does not directly address tolerance in any of their official statements, but the 'About' statement of the new Tony Blair Institute for Global Change alludes to the concept in their calls for coexistence and being open minded.[70] Both of these concepts are important for tolerance and understanding, but the other components to this definition of an informed, tolerant citizen on these topics are vital for complete adherence to the term.

Limitations

Next the limitations of the study will be identified, starting with the inability of the researcher to directly interview or survey students. The policies of the county that was investigated preclude any undergraduate research in schools. To adhere to these policies and to protect the identities of the students, the names of the students, teacher, school and county will remain anonymous. The original plan was to produce a list of interview questions alongside a survey for students to fill out so that their educational and tolerance levels on the subject could be measured. This was a hugely limiting factor since the proposed causal relationships is about students and the data had to be collected through the teacher's opinions and observations in the classroom. The loss of direct student input is disappointing, but the research will still be valuable. It was interesting to hear the teacher's take on the program's effects since they are very familiar with their students. The researcher was also able to ask the teacher to lead an open discussion on the topics, and gauged student knowledge and opinions that way.

Thirdly, the research was limited by which people agree to be interviewed. Unfortunately, the researcher could only secure two interviews, one with the teacher of the Comparative World Religions class being studies and the other was with the US Director of

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[69] I am going to add a section on tolerance and the difference between active and passive tolerance later. I haven't found an article I like enough to cite

[70] "Co-existence." Tony Blair Institute. Accessed April 06, 2017. http://institute.global/co-existence.

Generation Global. Although this factor was out of the control of the researcher, the research revealed an incomplete picture of the program's effect. Unfortunately, nothing could be done about this and the research proceeded with the data available.

Additionally, a school in Virginia is vastly different from one in Texas or New York. Different locations have a host of other factors that could affect the student's knowledge of the Middle East and Islam. The third hypothesis addresses this problem and it is likely that there will be a large degree of variance. Still, since the research observed the students before and after the videoconference and the teacher knew students' capabilities before and after the introduction of Generation Global, some of these effects were controlled for. Also, this research generally makes a valuable contribution because there has been no similar study of Global Generation's impact in any U.S. school, so it will be a starting point for additional research.

Lastly, this study can only address one section of the proposed causal relationship between sufficient educational practices regarding the Middle East and Islam and informed foreign policy making related to the region. This case study cannot reveal what the students will believe or do in the future, even if there is satisfactory teaching on the subjects. Since this is not a longitudinal study, any of the effects could be limited to a short period of time and fail to persist into adulthood, when voting becomes available to the subjects and the effects are more salient. Still, the research will be useful for showing a stage in the process and add to the growing body of research on the topic, which becomes more vital in this age where terrorism and Middle Eastern conflicts are so problematic.

Methodology

The researcher completed a case study of Generation Global, focused on a particular Comparative World Religions classroom in Virginia. The data collection methods were twofold:

classroom observation and interviews. Classroom observations were conducted three times. The first was before the selected videoconference, the second was during the videoconference, and the third was directly after the videoconference. For the classroom observation before the videoconference, the teacher, who will be referred to as Jill, led an open discussion with the students about their knowledge about the Middle East and Islam with questions provided by the researcher. The researcher took notes during the videoconference describing the input of each student who spoke from the four schools participating. Afterward, the researcher took notes as the teacher asked each student to share their 'takeaway' from the videoconferences or any questions they had from any of the videoconferences. Second, interviews were conducted. Prior to the videoconference, the researcher was able to interview the US director of Generation Global. After the videoconference, the researcher interviewed the teacher of the Virginia classroom. The videoconference was held with four schools, the Virginia High School, two Ukrainian schools, and one school in Egypt.

The students normally do about six videoconferences a year in this course and this year there are two classes with about 65 students total. Because of scheduling, the initial observations were completed with a different class than the one that participated in the videoconference. Unfortunately this selection bias could not be avoided because all of the conferences are not with Middle Eastern countries and the students are on block scheduling, so the researcher was restricted by these factors. The conference chosen had to be with a country in this region, otherwise it would be irrelevant to the topic of this research. In addition, the date was dependent on the conference subject and country and had to be completed earlier rather than later to account for deadlines and to finish in a timely manner. The videoconference was on March 21st, so the pre-conference operation occurred on March 20th and the post-conference session occurred right

after the videoconference on March 21st.

The purpose of the first classroom experience was to get a sense of the overall knowledge and experience of the students with the Middle East and Islam prior to the Generation Global Conference. The second day in the classroom recorded the experience of students on the day of the conference, and the reflection session measured the effect of the conference on the student's mindsets.

The interview questions varied depending on the interviewee's position, but all addressed the same types of things, trying to ascertain how much change the program stimulates in the student's education and level of tolerance. They were open-ended and left room for the interviewee to provide additional information. All of the interviews could have been anonymous or attributed—whichever the interviewee wished them to be. The list of questions for Jill was more extensive since she is on the front lines of the program and sees the real effects of Generation Global.

Results

Observational Data:

Observation Before:

The observational data from the classroom experience was highly valuable and gave the researcher a chance to get some insight into what the students knew before the observed videoconference. As mentioned above, the students in this setting were not the students that attended the videoconference the following day, but all of the students were invited, so there were one or two students that overlapped on both days the researcher was in the classroom. On Monday, March 20th, 2017, the researcher observed the class of approximately 30 students who

were present that day from 8:10 AM to 9:40AM. The class began with what Jill called 'community sharing' of what each student did over the weekend. Some students gave more details than others but each was required to share. This gave the class a more relaxed atmosphere and was a perfect segue into the proposed open discussion the teacher agreed to lead. This was the first time that the students had a direct conversation about the Middle East and Islam since the class had not covered Abrahamic religions yet. The conversation consisted of six questions and then a final 'takeaway' from the discussion.

The first part of the conversation asked two related questions. The first was, "What do you know about the Middle East?" The second was, " What words come to mind when you hear 'Middle East'?" The students latched on to the second and answered with eight words. They were: deserts, conflict, hajj, Islam, home, dysfunction, baklava, and Islamophobia. The most interesting answer was definitely 'home.' This was the first indication of many that the class was very diverse with several people who identified as Middle Eastern or Muslim, or had ties to the region or religion.

The next question for students to answer asked, "What do people you know say about it?" The answers to this question addressed both positive and negative aspects of the region. The students began to talk directly about the media's influence on the perception of the Middle East. The first statement was that people think of it as a "bad place" but that "some people say it's beautiful." This kind of set the tone for the conversation where students said that the "area is exposed to a lot of culture and religions" and that "…it is home to a lot of people," although "there are other negative opinions." One student acknowledged that, "Yes we are in conflict but it doesn't mean that Islam should have a bad rep because of it or that it's a bad place. The Orlando Shooting twists people's minds." Another student said that all she hears on the news is

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conflict and dysfunction, but that members of her dad's side of the family talk about the weather and celebrations. She says that this "brought the idea down to earth," that the people there have "comedians, actors, and TV shows just like we do." Two other students also referenced the negative tone of the media on the region and that it "overexaggerates issues" and fuels Islamophobia by putting "all Muslims in one evil stereotype." The media was said to ignore that "a lot of the people are just like us." Additionally, two students claimed particular backgrounds and places they used to live. One said that his family is from Palestine and that his dad talks about his family there. The student continued and referenced that "they have the same milestones as us like marriage and college." Another student mentioned that she grew up in the Middle East. She said that people ask her two things. They ask if she had to wear a burka and if anything bad or violent had happened while she was there. She said that she answers that "she did not have to wear a burka except in Saudi Arabia and that there were uprisings in 2013 where her elementary school was set on fire in Tunisia, but that nothing else happened in all the time she lived in the Middle East." She seemed to want to make the point that the Middle East is not what people think it is.

The third question asked, "What do you consider as a part of the Middle East?" This query garnered fewer responses because of the inherent controversies in the classification of the Middle East. However, the four students who responded did so fairly accurately. They captured the media influence on the term, its association with conflict, and named many of the countries that are part of the regions. The first student said he was "unsure" but that "most people in the West use it as a term to categorize all the conflict going on." The second student listed, "Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Cyprus" but explicitly excluded Palestine, interestingly enough. The third student, said that "no one close to me has been in the Middle East" and that all she knows

"is what the media tells [her]" and that she "[doesn't] know what else to believe." The last student had the most holistic definition of the Middle East. They identified that "the region extends from Pakistan, Morocco, and Algeria, from Tunisia down to Sudan, and Turkey," and that "the countries included are primarily Arab countries."

The fourth question asked was, "What is the difference between the words: Muslim, Arab, and the Middle East?" There were six responses to this question that all seemed to understand that Muslim is associated with a religion, an Arab is a person, and that the Middle East is a region. One was even more specific, identifying a Muslim as "a person who believes in Islam," Arab as an "ethnicity," and the Middle East as a "geographic location." Some students also expand on the terms and say that many Americans think that all three words are the same. One student even made a comparison of the three words to Hispanic, Spanish, and Latino. The last student further identified common misconceptions, explaining that, "…only 20% of Muslims are Arab. Not all Muslims are Arab and not all Arabs are Muslim. Muslims come from all over… and not all identify as Arab."

The fifth query switched focus to Islam, asking, " What do you know about Islam?" and "What kinds of things come to mind when you hear Muslim or Islam?" The five responses to these questions were quite detailed. The first student shared some pretty personal stories from her stepmother's experience with refugees. She argued that, "refugees need help" and "should not be put in the same categories as terrorists." She has heard "stories about missing family members who are injured and house raids." She said she "finds parts of the religion interesting but it's hard because her stepmom comes back and sits on the couch and cries" because of the horrors she witnesses. It seems that this student is reluctant to learn more about Islam because she associates it with the plight of the refugees and the sad experiences her stepmom witnesses.

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The second person says that, "Islam is a peaceful religion," "not like what people think of it," and that "the media manipulates it and portrays it as a violent religion." The third answer speaks along the same lines saying that, "the media only speaks of radical Islam." He then continued on and said more specific things about "how it was created by Mohammed the prophet, who gained a large following and spoke of peace." He said, "people started writing down his words in the Quran but now people only look at certain passages. " He related that, "in reality, [people] don't look at the book right." The fourth speaker expressed sadness over the fact that "people don't take the time to get to know the religion." She mentioned that the "president tells us that radical Islam is what we should be afraid" and that it is "sad that we're at this point in our country." The last student mentioned that when they think of Muslim or Islam they think "misunderstood." They said that the media "focuses on negatives and people don't take time to do the research" and that "there are verses of war in the Quran but also verses of war in the Bible." The last students who answered the question closed by saying that it makes them "upset," "it makes me want to cry." Much of the class seemed to feel an overwhelming sense of sadness because of the misconceptions tied to Islam.

The last question was asked spontaneously by Jill based on the content of the conversation. She told the students that, "they were sharing many enlightened opinions" and asked them, "Where does your knowledge come from?" The students answered with a variety of sources. They cited the Ted Radio Hour, analysis of Ted talks, a knowledgeable student in the class, a stepmother (the student who mentioned her stepmother's work with refugees), the Comparative World Religions class, Muslim friends, online research, Buzzfeed news, and a soccer game where ISIS attacked, which led the student to do more research. Buzzfeed was an unusual answer, but the student who cited it explained that the website "has a liberal point of

view" and that "the reporters go to the Middle East" and that these articles are "more in depth than other silly pieces." The students who answered seem to do a good amount of research on their own, seeking out other sources besides the mainstream ones that may not show the whole story.

At the end of the class, Jill asked each student to identify one 'takeaway' from the discussion. Since there were so many responses, only trends will be identified for this portion. Students focused a lot on the media. Many were skeptical of its influence and said they want to do more research, travel more, and that others also need to do more in-depth research. Interestingly enough, two students played devil's advocate and stated that, "although the media is biased, it is good that they are covering the topics since they would get no attention otherwise." Students also reiterated that "people should not put terrorism and Islam together" and that "Americans have been looking to do this since 9/11." Next, students addressed the kinds of environments that they have grown up in. Some cited being surrounded by open-minded people, but others only talked about knowing what the media tells them. However, the students who relied on the media for information on the Middle east and Islam also directly talked about how open-minded their fellow students were in the class and how this has influenced them to become more open minded. They were saddened by the refugee crisis and the kinds of things that people, who come from a close-minded space share on social media. A student who was identified as a good source of information on the Middle East and Islam by one of his fellow students made the final statement. He thought it was interesting that "most say news sources are unreliable or uninformative" and that this is "true." He closed with an entreaty for people to study. The overwhelming messages from these statements are that the media is biased, that this class has helped some students become more open minded, and that people should do more research on

the Middle East and Islam.

Videoconference:

The researcher observed the videoconference on Tuesday March 21, 2017 from 8:00AM to 9:40AM. Of the four schools participating, one was from Virginia, two were from Ukraine, and one was from Cairo, Egypt. Before the videoconference started, the moderator gave a little introduction to the session by identifying that the topic of conversation was festivals and reminded the students that, "you are not representing your school, family, or faith traditions in the discussion, just yourself." During the course of the session, there were only two questions asked. Following these sharing sessions, there was a question and comment part, and finally, closing remarks.

The first question addressed community. The moderator asked, "What does it look like to you?" and "What would you change if you could?" There were two responses from the first Ukrainian school, three from the school in Cairo, four from the other Ukrainian school, and three from the Virginia high school. Many of the participants mentioned their family, town, friends, or classmates. The three responses from Cairo were pretty in line with all the others. The first response talked about the classroom community, the second talked about going out with friends, and the last talked about traditions like family meetings on Friday. The Virginia high school had longer, more involved answers and was the only group to answer the second question. The first student talked about the community at their high school in terms of it being accepting and diverse and having a lot of opportunities because of its proximity to the nation's capitol. She said she would like to see "a change in the fast pace of life", and that, "sometimes it would be nice to take a break from that environment." The second person talked about the community that she

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runs cross-country and track with. The change she wanted to see was an increased priority on other things in life alongside education. The last speaker from Virginia talked about the theatre community and said she would like to change the over-attachment to social media. She wanted to take a break from that to focus on her real life community.

The second question asked the students to "talk about a festival you celebrate, and to not focus on what you do for it, but what it means to you personally." This time, there were four responses from Egypt, five from one Ukrainian school, three from the Virginia school, and three from the other Ukrainian school. There were a wide variety of holidays talked about in this conversation, with some overlap between countries. Some of the holidays included Ramadan, Independence Day, Miner's Day, the Fourth of July, and National Women's Day. Two of the speakers from Egypt talked about Ramadan and another talked about Mother's Day in Egypt. The Virginia high school posed a question that was discussed in the following question and comment session, but it was noteworthy because it was addressed to the Egyptian school and began with the Arabic greeting "Assalam alaikum." The student then asked if the students in Egypt celebrated Western traditions besides Eid and Ramadan like Valentine's Day. The other two participants from Virginia talked about the Fourth of July and a celebration of a Bolivian saint, representing a diversity of celebrations from America.

The question and comment portion of the conversation addressed several questions. The first was the question from the Virginian school to the Egyptian school about whether or not the Egyptian school celebrated Western holidays from Virginia to Egypt. The second was a question from Egypt to Virginia and Ukraine about wearing uniforms and private versus public schools. Next, Egypt asked the Virginia school what the flag behind them meant to their school community. A Ukrainian school also asked the Virginia school about Valentine's Day and if it

was the same as in the movies. Lastly, a Ukrainian school asked Egypt to tell them about the holy period of Ramadan.

For the first question, the Egyptians revealed that they celebrate western holidays like Valentine's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Valentine's Day. The answers to the second question explained the difference between public and private schools, and the student who answered also identified himself as Pakistani when he said that he used to wear a school uniform in Pakistan. The student had diverging opinions on uniforms, both within schools and between them. For the third question, the Virginian student answered that the flag is important because "we are a diverse community of lots of different races, backgrounds, and religions" and that "it is important to be able to coexist and live together." The Virginians then explained that the portrayal of Valentine's Day in movies is very exaggerated and is not as big of a deal for teenagers as for younger students. Lastly, an Egyptian student answered the question about Ramadan, stating that he reads the holy book, the Quran, and prays more than usual. The students seemed to find that there were a lot more similarities than they had anticipated.

In closing, the moderator allowed each school to have one student present a final statement. The Egyptian student said they "learned that all schools are accepting, love and help each other" and that "there is diversity within each community." One Ukrainian student said that the session "inspired her" and that she had not known about Ramadan and Valentine's Day. She also directly referenced the Virginian student who talked about spending more times with friends instead of on social media and said that she is "inspired thanks to her." The Virginia student's takeaway was that "even though we live in different countries" she has realized "how similar we all are and that we all celebrate a lot of the same holidays." The last statement from the other Ukrainian school was similarly uplifting. She thanked all the participants and said that she found

that they all shared many of the same values and wished them to "enjoy every day of [their] life."

Reflection After:

Following the videoconference on March 21st, the students reset the classroom to its normal arrangement. Before the reflection session, Jill presented that Generation Global has applications open for fifteen moderator spaces. The commitment would be two hours a week for a year and reported to be good for college applications.

Next, Jill asked each student to share their 'takeaway' or any questions they have had from any of the videoconferences. The first student said that they "think that it's a cool opportunity to do something like this" and "connect with people across the world" and that, "her mom wishes she had gotten to have this opportunity." Afterwards, many of the students identified that there were a lot of similarities between the students from other countries and themselves, especially in reference to the school in Cairo. Many talked about shared holidays like Valentine's Day, Ramadan, and Independence Day and views on uniforms. Some also discussed how American traditions are portrayed in film and how it is "funny" to think that people think that the fictional situations reflect reality. The students discussed how Valentine's Day is overplayed in the movies, making it seem as if all young people do big romantic gestures to celebrate the holiday. One student also talked about how she has realized that their community is so much more diverse compared to others. She talked about how people at her school celebrate a Bolivian festival, Ramadan, and that she herself is German and Iranian, and thus celebrates her own diverse set of holidays. She related that it is "amazing that no matter where you come from it's normal to see different culture." Some of the students were also surprised to see the diversity in their own classroom.

Two students also address the media. The first talked about how the conferences made them think that, "not much news comes out of Egypt and Ukraine unless it is negative." He then asks, since other may not know a lot about American politics, "what do they think based on our media?" The second student had two years of VCs and wonders if all countries see Americans as the same as what they see in movies or other platforms.

Overall, the students seemed to have been affected by the videoconference in four ways. First, many learned new things they had not known about Ukraine and Egypt. Secondly, the students saw many similarities between themselves and the other students from other countries. Thirdly, some students recognized the diversity in their own classroom. Lastly, students saw how the media shapes the impression of a country and are wondering what impression other countries have of America based on our media.

Interviews:

Virginia Secondary Level Teacher

The researcher's interview with the Virginia public school teacher, who will be referred to as Jill, occurred on Wednesday, March 29th at 1:50pm. As background to this educator, Jill teaches Comparative World Religions (11th/12th grade), Leadership 1-3 (all grades), and Ancient World History. She has been involved with Generation Global/ Face to Faith since she began teaching in 2012 and has participated in about 37 videoconferences in the past five years. She facilitated nine just in the past year.

The first line of questioning tried to get a sense of Jill's opinions on the current teaching of the Middle East and Islam in US public high schools. She said she only knows what is taught

in public high schools in Virginia, but that there is "only a small space to learn" on these topics. If the students are interested in learning more, they have to do a lot of research on their own. To complicate matters, teachers are also not properly trained to teach on these topics. Jill explained that "a lot of teachers get a little nervous talking about things they don't know or don't want to be offensive." She says there "needs to be more cultural competency training for everyone." When questioned further about the current resources available for teachers in a later part of the interview, Jill explained that teachers do not get a lot of support. She is part of the Hindu-American Advisory Board, which runs trainings about Hinduism, but there is no equivalent for Islam. She related that, "the education field is way behind." She also talked more about limitations of her own teaching when asked, "How would you teach differently if you had unlimited resources and time?" She stated that, "time is the biggest factor" because "she never feels like she has covered enough of a religion in her class since she has to cram all of them in a one year period" and that "she'd like more professional development for herself." She wants to teach more, but the videoconferences take three hours of instructional time. Still, this time spent seems to be worthwhile to Jill.

In the section ascertaining what kind of experience Jill has had with Generation Global, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. When asked about any challenges she encountered with Generation Global, Jill said she had no problems. She continued on, saying that scheduling is the most difficult part of the process, but that the teacher just needs to sit down far in advance to deal with these logistics. One question also inquired about how helpful Generation Global is in introducing potentially controversial topics in a different, academic way since students teach other students and it is operated in a controlled setting. The response was that it is very helpful. The program provides a lesson plan if teachers want to use it, an agenda, numerous contacts, and

a trained moderator. This question also revealed unexpected findings about the obstacles that bar some American teachers from using the program. Jill says that it is "hard for teachers to trust students to dialogue well without offending someone" and that "Americans teachers have needed more hand holding" because they "don't take enough initiative." This could be related to American's fear of legal cases, but more data would be necessary to explore this. Still she said that once "teachers do it once, they are hooked." It appears to be all about taking that first step with the program. She also gave more detail about the extra materials that Generation Global provides in her answer to another question. Jill says there are a lot of activities that she does not use because she knows what her students like and need but it's nice to have "something to fall back on if [you] feel uncomfortable."

This conversation also revealed more about "Essentials of Dialogue," a seminar that every class who uses Generation Global is required to go through to participate in the videoconferences. Jill says it teaches students to say thank you at the end of statements and has activities asking about what words are offensive and what is acceptable. People inevitably disagree on what is offensive and what is not which leads to discussions about tone, volume, and appearance that will help the students have respectful dialogue in the videoconferences.

The next grouping of questions explored the effects of the program on the students. One is the student's increasing confidence to speak with each videoconference. The first time the class participates in a videoconference, Jill said that some students are "shell shocked" and "overwhelmed" because they do not know that the conference is a "safe space" yet, but that they talk more by the last videoconference. When asked, "How much do you think Global Generation helps students learn about the Middle East and Islam in particular?" Jill answered that, "Anytime you make an individual space for something it's good." She said that, "this experience is eye

opening to people since many think that other people in other places do not impact them. It gives them the chance to see the Middle East and Islam and interact with people from the Middle East or Muslims." Jill also described her favorite experience in a videoconference with a Muslim or Middle Eastern country. A couple years ago, the students talked with students in Syria. They had to reschedule twice because of bombings, but it was moving to the American students how badly the Syrian students wanted to talk to them. The videoconferences seem to imprint on the students but it is less certain how much concrete information is being taken away. Jill seemed less confident when asked about whether or not students really know more about the Middle East and Islam after the videoconferences. She said she asks students to look up the schools before the videoconferences, but many do not do this. According to Jill, students are "disengaged until it's in their face" because "they are over stimulated generationally."

When questioned on the specific relationship between the conferences and expressions of increased tolerance, Jill said it was "difficult to quantify the effects." However, she receives a lot of parent emails talking about the positive effects the videoconferences have on their children. She also revealed in a later question that many of the students attended the Women's March on Washington. What remains to be seen is whether this can be attributed to Generation Global or the status of the students themselves due to other factors. Still, it seems that the program is changing student behavior in the long term. Four of Jill's students have pursued International Relations because of Generation Global. Additionally, Jill saw one of her students from her first year teaching in a Starbucks drive through, and the student told her that she "thinks about the videoconferences all the time and how cool they were." Jill invited her to come in and sit in the videoconferences. This encounter happened too recently for Jill to have heard from the student, but she just might follow through.

Next, the researcher sought to separate the effects of the videoconferences from the class and the diversity of the county the school is located in. In the interview, Jill explained that she has not covered the Abrahamic religions and leaves them for last since students do not have the tools for discussing these more difficult topics in the beginning. This is interesting, since it shows that any knowledge that students have on Islam must come from sources outside of class materials. The class directly talks about media and news in the new project that Jill pioneered this year, where each student gives a twelve-minute presentation on any topic in the media as long as it addresses tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The media was a topic of conversation in both the pre and post videoconference sessions, so there may be some connection to the class project. The diversity of the class was also evident from the researcher's observations, so questions about this factor were also included. Jill said that the videoconferences protect her Muslim and Middle Eastern students because they do not have to identify themselves if they do not wish to but can if they want. However some students are very vocal about their identities such as the Muslim-Student Association President. The researcher also asked if Jill thought Generation Global was less effective in less diverse schools in the US. Jill thought that the program would be even "more effective for areas that are culturally homogenous because they would really be seeing new things. " Yet, this exposure is likely limited by the number of teachers who can be convinced to pilot Generation Global in their classrooms.

Still, overall, Jill says that that Generation Global provides something more than what she can in her class. It allows students "to actually interact with people from somewhere else with a different worldview." She says "[she] can talk to them about [her] experiences," but that it is not the same.

The study also included input from a Generation Global Administrator to ascertain the program's views on the education on the Middle East and Islam. The other interview occurred on February 8, 2017 with Kiran Thadhani, the head of Generation Global in the US. She comes from a development background and formerly worked for the Posse Foundation in New York City. She only started to work for the program in January of 2017.

Like Jill, she felt that US public high schools do not cover Islam and the Middle East adequately. She described the limited space religion has in education and the "fear in community to talk about religion." She said that people need to know how to talk about it and to both learn the "educational pieces" and "experience the context." Kiran thought that the conversations that Generation Global facilitates are important because it is "important for communities to process globalization " and have a "place for narrative and story." The students need to hear more than just what the media tells them. They "need a safe space for individuals to share stories and acknowledge difference." She says it is also notable that these conversations are a dialogue instead of a debate, where "one opinion is deemed supreme," to be "more open-minded and kind."

When questioned about what makes this program different from others with the same purpose, she says that Generation Global is unique in its work "touring through difference." The program encourages people to have identity-based conversations. Generation Global is also free and people can enter it in a lot of different ways. It is flexible so that it can be used in the way that is right for a person, whether that be a one time videoconference session or running an essentials of dialogue class.

Kiran did not have much of an answer to how much Global Generation helps students

learn about the Middle East and Islam in particular and just stated that she "think there's endless work that needs to be done especially given the current situation." She did however give an example of how Generation Global tries to deal with one part of Muslim culture, the *hijab*. She said that the program does not go in with an agenda. For a conference between Palestine and an East Coast school if America, the conversation topic was the *hijab* but it tried to ask questions about how it made the students feel more than the practice itself.

When asked if she had any concerns for the future of the program in light of the current political climate, Kiran was concerned for the country but had no fear for the program, as there is more and more interest in it.

The conversation with Kiran was fruitful in gaining more insight into the reasoning behind the program, but did not give much in the way of specifics on how the program affects students. She told me an Exeter report was recently published with metrics on acts of tolerance inspired by Generation Global, but this researcher was unable to gain access to the report because it is strictly internal to those who work for the Tony Blair Institute.

Interpretation of Results

From the data collected in the pre-videoconference session, it is evident that the students who spoke generally fit the qualifications of informed, tolerant citizens on the Middle East and Islam before the videoconference occurred. Some, but not all, knew where the region was on a map, most knew the stereotypes of the region and the religion, and many seemed open and eager to learning about the Middle East and Islam and accepting of differences. None of them seemed to prescribe to the stereotypes that stem from Orientalism. However, despite these positive attributes, the process is not complete since the students may not know much about the current

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events related to the region and the history, culture, geography, and social norms of the people who live in the Middle East. In fact, Jill stated that most of the students often do not research about the schools they participate in the conferences, which are sometimes with Middle Eastern or Muslim nations. Still, some students talked about doing more extensive research on their own through various mediums and were aware of media biases when questioned about the source of their knowledge. Several of the students also had insider knowledge because they identified as 'Middle Eastern,' 'Muslim,' had family or friends that identified as such, or had family who worked in the region. It is difficult to determine how much the students really know, especially those who do not have this backchannel of information. It is also hard to make any general statements about all the students since the research only contains responses from some individuals on different questions. It was an open discussion and not a survey or interview of each student. Nonetheless, the knowledge and mindset of the general body of students is highly encouraging and students seem to have many of the tools necessary to teach them even more about the Middle East and Islam and the capacity to share this information with others.

The data collected from the videoconference and ensuing reflection session were also interesting and surprising. These two sessions session were conducted with a different class than the pre-videoconference section, but all the influencing factors were the same. This was not ideal, but both were influenced by the class itself, the program Generation Global, and the diversity of the county they live in. The feedback showed both positive and possibly negative aspects of the program. The videoconference was a short, one-hour encounter, but showed students that there were a lot of similarities between the students in various countries and was more of a "touring through similarities" than a "touring through difference." It also made students more aware of the diversity that existed even among the students in their own

classroom. The students learned a little about social norms since the topic was festivals, but the conversation was more concentrated on individual interpretations than how the festival was celebrated, which has upsides and downsides. This kept the conversation civil and ameliorated the risk of misrepresenting a culture. However, since each student only represented themselves in the conversation, it was almost as if people were just meeting each other rather than engaging in intercultural dialogue. The students did not learn a significant amount about Egyptian culture from this encounter, only a minimal amount about festivals. The videoconference may have also verified concerns that the students participating may not be representative of their countries. It looked like the Egyptian school was private since students were required to wear uniforms so the researcher confirmed this fact by looking up the school.[71] These students may be more affluent and appear to be more westernized than others in Egypt since they attend this private institution and speak fluent English. As recognized by Janet Bordelon, the fact that all of the videoconferences are completed in English may prohibit certain students from gaining the opportunity to participate in Generation Global. This could then present a skewed view of that country's people. Still, it makes a big difference to be exposed to new types of people, even if they are not perfectly representative. The videoconference could definitely be an opportunity to open someone's mind about accepting differences and seeking out more information, which is vital to becoming an informed, tolerant citizen. The videoconference also unexpectedly made the students consider the impact of media on their understanding of distant cultures through the discussion of how American media portrays Valentine's Day in an exaggerated manner. The students then reflected on how their ideas about other countries are highly influenced by what they see in movies and television and wondered more about what citizens of other countries

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[71] The Egyptian participants attend the Dr. Nermien Ismail American School, a private institution.

think about America based on these same sources. This videoconference happened to spark discussion of media influence, but this research cannot know if this topic comes up in every videoconference.

Concerning the research hypotheses tested, the lines are highly blurred on what factors are necessary or most important to creating tolerant citizens who are informed about the Middle East and Islam. The hypotheses are all correct in some regards but irrelevant in others. Generation Global does seem to do more in shifting notions on the tolerance side of the proposed education model. However, the students also seemed fairly tolerant and open-minded prior to the videoconference, so these effects may have more to do with either the teaching style of Jill in her Comparative World religions course or the diversity of the school. In the same vein, many students were already actively seeking more information and participating in protests like the Women's March on Washington before the videoconference, so again Generation Global may not be the prime factor in this effect. Unfortunately, the second hypothesis concerning a divergence of effects depending on location proved to be untestable in this study since the researcher was unable to secure any additional interviews with teachers in different states or counties of the US.

Conclusion

From the first day of classroom observation, it was obvious that this World Religions class was a special case; the students seemed to have an enlightened point of view on the Middle East and Islam. Students already seemed to be pretty tolerant, open-minded, and informed, even if they did not meet all the qualifications of informed citizens related to the topics. Thus, it is difficult to make a case for Generation Global making a huge difference in the education of these students. However, this does not mean that Generation Global does not have a huge effect on

other schools across the US. The results are valuable as a basis for further research into what exactly develops students like those this researcher observed in this Virginia classroom. It is also notable that there are no other open studies on the impact of Generation Global in the US. Further studies should be completed at schools that utilize the Generation Global program with locations of varying diversities and classes, to try to isolate the factors that are most vital to creating informed, tolerant citizens on the Middle East and Islam. From this case study, two factors stood out that seem to be influencing the students greatly as well. They are critical views of the media and diversity in the classroom. Both should be investigated separately in their effects on the students as well as in relation to Generation Global to see if these factors are perhaps more important to making informed, tolerant citizens than intercultural dialogue and the teaching of religion.

Additionally, since this case study was able to observe the effects of Generation Global firsthand, this study can also posit some suggestions to the improvement of the program. Generation Global is completing remarkable work connecting students across the world and helping students discover the many similarities that people share across borders. Nonetheless, a couple of additions could make the program even more effective. The first is the addition of some contention into the program. The students say a lot without saying anything at all, building off one another to create a shared space of similarities, but they do not explore their differences in a significant way that could really test how much tolerance is really being developed. The students focused on the similarities they had with the Ukrainians and Egyptians more so than the differences, and accepting that these differences are normal and acceptable. Secondly, critical analysis on the media influence would be a prime addition to the discussions of topics since the US's perception of the Middle East and Islam relies so heavily on the media. This is an age

where information is readily available to most people with access to the Internet in the US, but this may not be true for students in other countries. Lastly, it would be beneficial for there to be some translators introduced to the model of the Generation Global videoconferences so that students who do not speak English also have access to the program, and the current participants of the program also have access to these non-English speakers' input. In this Virginia school, Generation Global seems to be already successful at putting students on the path to become global citizens, but it has the potential to do so even more in fighting ignorance and bias on the Middle East and Islam.

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