Almost 25 years ago to the very date of this writing, Tim Berners-Lee sent an “information management” proposal to his boss at CERN (2008). His boss’s initial reaction to the proposal was that it was “vague, but exciting.” Yet, Mike Sendall (the boss) allowed Berners-Lee to continue his work. Of course, the concept in Berners-Lee’s proposal would lead to the creation of the World Wide Web, arguably one of the most transformative ideas in the history of the world. Still, it took more time for people to fully recognize the significance of Berners-Lee’s contribution. When he sent a formal proposal for a presentation on his idea to the 1991 Hypertext conference in San Antonio, Texas, the paper was rejected. Yet, the world would soon catch on, and people would be in homes and schools and offices linking all sorts of ideas and information, in ways that were unimaginable only a few years earlier.

For those of us committed to the relationship among global literacy, global citizenship, and learning technologies, there are a few lessons to be learned from the story outlined above. The most obvious is that without the World Wide Web, the discourse represented by a book such as Promoting Global Literacy Through Technology Infused Teaching and Learning would likely not exist. Absent the “hyperlinked” world created by Berners-Lee’s vision, it’s hard to imagine authors addressing topics like “social networking and Google Earth,” “technology-enabled active learning,” “repurposing mobile applications,” and “online collaborative learning,” and so on. After all, the World Wide Web is an über reification of Marshall McLuhan’s “global village” (McLuhan, 1963). If McLuhan’s seminal book reflected the technology of his era (e.g., television, radio), it’s hard to imagine that his vision could have been better fulfilled by anything other than the Word Wide Web. It’s almost as though Berners-Lee recognized that the Gutenberg Galaxy, where toolsets could enable unprecedented mass communication, with the potential of a global impact, would only be complete when mechanical movable type printing presses (books), followed by radio wave technologies (TV, radio), were topped off by a digital hyperlinked network (WWW).

But is it global? Can it be? The other key part of the story is the initial reaction of Berners-Lee’s boss: “vague, but exciting.” In many ways, when I hear the “global” used in phrases such as “global education” or “global literacy” or “global citizenship,” I have a similar reaction. “This sounds exciting, but I’m not sure I really understand it...it sounds rather ‘vague.’” Recently, key organizations have done laudable work in addressing topics such as global competencies (cf., the Asia Society (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011)) and global citizenship (cf., UNESCO and Oxfoam). So, on the one hand it appears that we’re collectively moving toward a global “literacy” (or “citizenship” or set of “competencies”); yet, in recent years, the notion of a global anything has been challenged, especially within the context of digitally connected (or disconnected) spaces. For example, rather than creating a hyperlinked, increasing interwoven global society, is it possible that the WWW and other Internet resources have instead cre-
ated highly specialized and, even, increasingly disconnected tribes (Kaushik, 2014)? Some have even questioned the notion of a global citizenship (Byers, 2005; Green, 2012; Parekh, 2008; Samra, 2007; Schattle, 2007), with a few going as far as to suggest that it may be a largely artificial Western construct.

Of course, a book whose main audience consists of educators would naturally adopt an orientation that emphasizes a global village perspective. And that makes sense. After all, ideal solutions to educational issues should work across as many classrooms and in as many countries as possible. While the debate on whether contemporary ICT unites people through an increasingly networked digital society or drives them apart into affiliated “tribes” will likely continue, educators will tend to tack toward a more unifying stance. (Perhaps people will alternately wander between those two worlds.) In any case, books like Promoting Global Literacy Through Technology Infused Teaching and Learning are important because they help us bring clarity the potential role of ICT as a powerful education tool. They put us on a path where, when exploring the relationship between global literacy and ICT, we can say, “this is exciting and now clearer.”

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