

FEATURE COLUMN

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Education for a Global Perspective

It has been said that youth of today are living in a transitional world in which the old order is dying but not yet dead and the new order has been conceived but is not yet born. Such times historically have been characterized by great conflict, disorder and uncertainty. Students are faced with economic, social and political concerns that are personal, national and global in scope.

All this can be overwhelming. It is very difficult for young people to consider national and global concerns if they feel disempowered and disconnected and if their personal lives are very complex. The world in which they live has shrunk immeasurably in the last few decades. The joys and sorrows are but microseconds away and only recently has the modern world fully come to appreciate the linkages and interdependence of humankind, both with itself and with the environment. For the first time in human history, the entire globe can be affected, almost simultaneously by changes that may be political, economic, social, cultural or environmental in nature.

The pressing nature of global problems clearly demonstrate the need for a new approach to education that must be global in scope as we search for a common understanding of the concepts of interdependence, interrelatedness, commonality, biocentrism and systems thinking. Traditionally, we have approached global issues as uni-dimensional, isolated events when in reality such events are multifaceted and interlocking. The Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* clearly underlines the failure of compartmentalized institutions to cope with interdependent global problems and calls for changes in attitudes, values and aspirations that will promote educational changes.

In Canada, the Public Participation Program of the Canadian International Development Agency has taken a leadership role in encouraging the education system to examine existing curriculum and to develop a global perspective in education when and where appropriate. Since 1987, eight provinces have initiated programs in global education. These projects have been organized by the teacher federations or unions and are overseen by Advisory Boards comprising representations of the Ministry of Education, Non-Government Organizations, Trustees, Educational Administrators, C.I.D.A. and the federations.

The projects are all different but in most cases have been directed towards the development of global education within the framework of Social Studies. In Ontario, with over 40% of Canada's teachers, 6,000 schools and 2 million students we have chosen a different route. It was felt that the provincial goals of Education and existing Geography and History guidelines (two distinct subjects in Ontario) provided ample opportunity for global education. It must be said that not every geography or history teacher is a global educator — far from it — but Ministry guidelines do not hinder the development of a global approach to social studies.

Our project — Education for a Global Perspective (EGP) — defined itself as an approach to education that would incorporate within the existing curriculum a global consciousness and the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to help teachers prepare our young people for effective participation in a world rapidly becoming more interactive and interdependent. The focus of the project is to encourage teachers to develop and integrate global concepts in the teaching/learning process where appropriate within existing curriculum in both elementary and secondary schools.

In this approach to education teachers and students will examine the real dilemmas facing society while they learn the basic concepts associated with a subject or content area. Existing subjects and content areas will take on a new meaning as they are directly linked to major global issues such as the condition of the environment, human rights, social justice, peace, development and the quality of life. As these issues are considered using a positive and "futures" approach, teachers will help students visualize the world they want to live in and take the action required to achieve a sustainable future. The project is supporting 9 pilot projects within the Province that are examining the existing curriculum and designing modules strategies, etc., to infuse a global perspective from kindergarden to grade thirteen Ontario Academic Credit level. A total of 24 modules are being developed. To date over 5,000 teachers have expressed a direct interest in the project. This group has one representative in 60% of Ontario schools. Several sabbaticals have been awarded and ten boards of education have global education committees. In the

summer of 1991, three summer institutes were held and a group of educators is creating an "Association of like minds." A number of Superintendents have been given responsibilities for global education and several in-school posts of responsibility also exist.

The largest single group of secondary teachers are geographers although they comprise only 10% of the secondary panel. This may indicate that geographers are shifting towards a "geography of concern" and are giving greater credence to "ethical" questions. It is also indicative of a broader concern by teachers in all disciplines and content areas for greater professional involvement in areas of contemporary global issues. Students need to understand the systemic nature of the modern world and geographers could play a major role in co-ordinating school based approaches to interdisciplinary studies. Selby and Pike in *Global Teacher, Global Learner* (p. 241–244) ask a number of questions crucial to the role of the geographer as a global educator. These questions focus us on values and ethical decision-making and in doing so enable us to provide students with the tools and skills to meet the daily challenges and be effective participants in a rapidly changing world. They argue that global themes in geography must include such issues as gender, peace and war, human rights, economic disparity and a futures orientation to add a global dimension to curriculum. Students of geography must be involved not only in examining human wellbeing within an ecological framework, but be allowed to explore their own values and to hopefully arrive at a rational action plan for their world.

References

Pike, G and Selby, D. 1988 **Global Teacher, Global Learner** (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, in association with the Centre for Global Education, University of York, Heslington, York YO15DD, UK) ISBN 0-340-40261 X

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