

# The Importance of People

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## World Problems Are People's Problems

**E**DUCATION FOR international understanding is not something apart. If education is good, it is international education, or intercultural education, or citizenship education, or democratic education, or education for the atomic age. Education for effective living in our twentieth century is all of a piece—with different emphases to be sure, but all of these bound together by their focus on helping people to meet the problems of their world, to fulfill their contemporary needs more adequately. Good education is international education.

When education helps us to live better with people—to understand people, to accept them, to work constructively with them; to respect people as individuals and as groups, in the classroom, in the neighborhood, in the wider community; to be concerned about them because they are people, whatever their background, wherever they live—then this education is international education. When it helps us to view our problems intelligently in a wider and wider context; to see problems today as potential means by which we can achieve a world rich in

personal and cultural satisfactions; when it helps us to plan, not only in terms of our wants and desires, but in terms as well of the wants and desires of all who would be affected by the plans; when it enables us to participate constructively in group planning and action; then this education is international. International education, both as means and as end, is a way of thinking about people, a way of relating to people.

## People—and Differences

International education for us then means redefining our role in a world of people, hundreds of millions of people, with whom our own destinies have become inextricably entwined. Hundreds of millions of people with widely different histories, widely different values, but common needs. Hundreds of millions of people with all of whom we can build together a world civilization which all of the builders can share.

In the building of this kind of world, many problems will have to be solved, and solved quickly: economic, political, linguistic, religious, technical, educational, and social. This calls for a re-

alistic understanding of the barriers that stand in the way of effective solution to these, the most important of which lie in the differences among people as indicated below:

● **Their Color.** Two-thirds of the world's people have dark skins. As long as the color of skin, the texture of hair, the shape of the nose constitute barriers to genuine respect for hundreds of millions of people in the world, the urgent problems of our times cannot be solved. It is not just a local matter then when children live in a city where schools are segregated because housing is segregated; or when a father rubs his hands together triumphantly in announcing that he has finally found a camp for his son which "won't be bothered by undesirable boys." Education which reduces the color barrier, bringing people of different races together to meet common problems, is international education.

● **Their Poverty.** Most of the world's people are poor. Two-thirds are ill, poorly housed, and underfed. Many are starving. The lack of understanding of these people by the other third constitutes a further block to necessary cooperative action. It is something more than a national matter then when people stereotype the unemployed as lazy, not wanting to work; when they reject as socialistic or communistic any attempts at planning for fuller production, fuller employment, decent low-cost housing, public power, or low cost medical help; when school children learn attitudes of condescension while filling Thanksgiving baskets for the "poor." Education that sees the importance of decent living

for all people is international education.

● **Their Literacy.** Millions of people the world over cannot read or write. While this is a grave handicap and must be ameliorated as quickly as possible, the equating of illiteracy with stupidity, the mistaking of words for wisdom, constitutes a still graver handicap. Intelligent action is action appropriate for meeting a need or solving a problem. Attitudes that automatically label those who have not been to school as "uneducated," as though all learning must take place in the school, have something more than local significance. So does the practice of helping to build in the school the concept that children in the high reading group are the best children, the smartest children, those of whom home and school are proudest. Education which helps people to recognize intelligence in behavior, and not in verbal facility alone, is international education.

● **Their Religion.** Less than a third of the world's population is Christian. The religious impulses of people over the globe expressed in rituals and systems of thought which may or may not include a god or gods, have profound effect on their living. Whenever a school or community persecutes the unorthodox or seeks to solve the problems or religious differences by pretending they don't exist, its children are handicapped. When school children are embarrassed or inhibited by feeling that their religious expressions are not the accepted ones, or by feeling that their expressions are the accepted ones in contrast to other people's that are not, barriers to international understanding are created. When education

seeks to develop in children an understanding of and respect for people, whatever spiritual expressions are a part of them, it is international education.

• **Their Technics.** Large areas of the world's people have participated little if at all in the technical and scientific revolution which has so profoundly patterned the life of America and the western world. Automobiles, bathrooms, vacuum cleaners, and automatic washing machines are not in and of themselves symbols of the achievement of man's highest good. People who are so accustomed to machines, to science and technology, that they come to label as ignorant those people who do not have such things, are cut off from participating in building a world civilization. When children, from their study of the Hot Lands, Desert Peoples, and others, learn about "primitive peoples," "backward nations," when they learn about the customs of people in other lands, without understanding the conditions or values or history that have given rise to such ways of living, they are taking on the provincial attitudes of their elders. Education which aims at perceiving the *person*, whether he rides or walks, whether he uses the Bendix or the neighboring stream, whether he dwells in modern steel building or portable tent, is international education.

• **Their Politics.** Vast millions of people throughout the world are part of the struggle for freedom. Their ways for planning and carrying out the strug-

gle are different. Those people who see issues or other people or ways of behaving as either all good or all bad, all right or all wrong, who fail to recognize that there are many sides to issues, that complicated problems require thoughtful analysis and consideration of alternatives, are distorting the facts of the world situation. Similarly, schools which accept or reject ideas in terms of labels rather than merit, which censor books, films, and topics for discussion, and otherwise limit the honest investigation by children into the problems of their world, are not fulfilling their responsibilities in the contemporary world. Education which equips children to face problems constructively together, examining viewpoints and reasoned alternatives sensitively and realistically in making their plans for action, is international education.

All of these differences of people are present in every school to some extent: their color, their poverty, their literacy, their religion, their technics, their politics. They are dividing local communities as well as the international community. A school which seeks to prevent these differences from acting as barriers to problem-solving is engaged in international education. Local problems are international problems. Good education is international education.

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