

International Education

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The States Go Global

Every decade or so, sparked by an international crisis, political leaders and national study commissions have urged educators to expand the international dimensions of the curriculum. Sputnik, the oil crises, and trade deficits, in turn, have increased the urgency with which we have addressed the need for Americans to better understand international issues.

Today, international trade, foreign investment, immigration, and cultural exchange affect virtually every community and every segment of our society. These effects are most apparent in business, where globalization is emerging as corporate America's strategy of choice for the 1990s:

With a new surge of investment abroad many American companies are shedding the banner of national identity and proclaiming themselves to be global enterprises whose fortunes are no longer so dependent on the economy of the United States (Uchitelle 1989).

Unfortunately, public debate over trade, multinational corporations, immigration, the environment, and other global issues has not kept pace with

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these changes. Yet how can our citizens become informed enough about such issues to form a cogent response? Certainly our schools provide little in the way of background or context that would enable citizens to understand what it means to live in a global society.

Fortunately, however, Americans are growing increasingly aware of the extent to which our present well-being and our hopes for the future are intertwined with events and peoples around the globe. More and more Americans are coming to realize that changes overseas—political changes such as *perestroika* in the U.S.S.R. or environmental changes such as the destruction of the rain forests of Brazil, to cite two obvious examples—can have serious repercussions in our country. In fact, we may have reached the moment in our history when international/global studies (and the study of foreign languages) are finally seen as essential elements of the curriculum rather than as temporary responses to some crisis.

In the past, international competence was needed only by diplomats in Washington or financial experts in New York. Today, however, international literacy has become essential to the social and economic well-being of every community across the country. Individuals who are competent and comfortable with people of different cultural backgrounds are needed in every state capitol, in every city hall. This need may well be the driving force behind many recent state efforts to improve global education:

- The California International Studies Project, established by the California Assembly, supports a number of resource centers that encourage colleges and universities to cooperate with local school districts to help teachers "gain the skills and knowledge necessary to increase the inter-

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national studies competence of their students."

- The Governor of Indiana has established a Corporation for Indiana's International Future, composed of government officials and business, labor, and education leaders. The Corporation's mission is "to strengthen Indiana's ability to compete in the global economy and to encourage educational and cultural exchanges between Indiana citizens and citizens of other countries." Among its early activities was a survey of school and college offerings in international studies.

- The New York State Department of Education has recommended the implementation of an act requiring "Education for International Communication and American Economic Competitiveness" to increase international skills and raise awareness

among Americans of the internationalization of our economy.

● The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has published and distributed to every school district in the state a resource guide for social studies, *Missouri in the World*, which includes about 20 lessons keyed to the "core competencies and key skills" published by the Department.

● The Iowa Department of Education has produced and distributed *A Guide for Integrating Global Education Across the Curriculum*, designed to give Iowa educators a detailed view of the global education standard adopted by the State Board of Education.

● The Illinois Department of Education has issued a document, *Increasing International and Intercultural Competence through the Social Sciences*, designed to be used with their

State Goals for Learning and Sample Learning Objectives: Social Sciences.

Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Hawaii, North Carolina, Kansas, Arkansas, Washington, and Oregon are among other states making special efforts in global/international education. And there are numerous initiatives at the local level. New plans, proposals, programs, and policies continue to be written and implemented. The extent and persistence of these efforts suggest that, this time, global education

will not be merely a passing fad—a temporary response to a real or presumed crisis—but an integral part of the curriculum. □

Reference

Uchitelle, Louis. (May 21, 1989). *New York Times* article, section I, p. 1.

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Update on a Resource for Futures Planning

Countdown 2001, which was cited on p. 48 of the September issue, has a new address: 110 N. Payne St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

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