

International Education

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Teaching for the "Nation of Human Beings"

Today music, movies, and TV programs, like news of political, athletic, or cultural events, circulate around the globe. Coca Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Toyotas, Fords, and Volkswagens are available worldwide. "Freedom," "perestroika," and "solidarity" are global rallying cries. Foreign investment, tourism, trade, immigrants, and imported cultural events are significant elements in the economic and social life of almost every local community.

The process of borrowing ideas and skills from others and adapting them to fit local conditions is as old as civilization, says historian William McNeill (1989). What is different about today's intercultural exchange is its massive scale and the speed of communication and reaction. A dramatic increase in scale of a centuries-old process has made the term *internationalization* appropriate.

Often, increased intercultural contact threatens old ways, creating tensions and hostility and prompting the need for understanding and cooperation. Vigorous, strong nations or industries are frequently pitted against less dominant ones, setting off debates about loyalty to nation and cultural identity—and sometimes giving rise to reactionary ultranationalism.

What are the implications of these developments for education? What should we be teaching children and youth who will become members of a global electorate¹ the names and capitals of 170 nations . . . how multinational corporations operate . . . the nature of different economic and political systems . . . the world as a system? How can the curriculum be internationalized?

In a society as diverse as ours—with long traditions of local responsibility—it is unlikely that any single curriculum model will suffice. Nonetheless, there is

a need for general guidelines that take into account the nature of today's information-rich, culturally diverse, and economically integrated world.

Science for All Americans (AAAS 1989) offers a number of guidelines that can serve as a starting point for those who wish to construct an internationalized curriculum. The report advocates that "students develop a set of cogent views of the world as illuminated by the concepts and principles of science," but many of its guidelines are equally useful in other curriculum areas and lend themselves well to interdisciplinary studies. The following areas of knowledge are good candidates for incorporation into an internationalized curriculum:

- The general features of the planet Earth, including its location, motion, origin, and resources; the effect of

living organisms on its surface and atmosphere; and how its landforms, oceans and rivers, climate, and resources have influenced where and how people live and how human history has unfolded.

- The human organism . . . including its similarities to other organisms, its unique capacity for learning, and the strong biological similarity among all humans in contrast to the large cultural differences among groups of them.

- Features of human social dynamics, including the consequences of the cultural setting into which a person is born, the nature and effects of class distinctions, the variations among societies in what is considered appropriate behavior, the social effects of group affiliation, and the role of technology in shaping social behavior.

- Social change and conflict, with emphasis on actors that stimulate or retard change, the significance of social trade-offs, causes of conflict, mechanisms for resolving conflict among groups and individuals, the role of government in directing and moderating change, and the effects of the growing interdependence of world social and economic systems.

- Forms of political and economic organization, emphasizing the intertwining of political and economic viewpoints, the ways in which theoretical political and economic systems differ from each other, and the frequent mixing of capitalistic and socialistic systems in practice.

- The human population, including its size, density, and distribution, the technological factors that have led to its rapid increase and dominance, its impact on other species and the environment, and its future in relation to resources and their use.

- The nature of technologies, including agriculture, with emphasis on both the agricultural revolution in an-

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Our world—internationalized, yet armed to the teeth and burdened with age-old rivalries and widespread differences in wealth, resources, and education—calls for transcending the narrow views that consider "my nation" only. Prospects for the survival of the "nation of human beings" may well depend on our capacity to make the world safe for diversity while we acknowledge our commonalities. Global educators will be working toward that end. □

¹See Chapter 2 of J. Wanniski, (1978), *The Way the World Works: How Economies Fail and Succeed*, (New York: Basic Books).

References

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