

Global Education

Identifying Local Links to the World

The bonds that connect us to others in the human family are easily found in every community and can be used to design instruction that heightens students' local and global awareness

"Close your eyes and point your finger,
On the map just let it linger,
Any place you point your finger to
There's someone with the same type blood
as you!"

—Zaret and Singer (1947)

1949: As a kindergarten student in Hudson, New York, I sang this song and others from the album "Little Songs on Big Subjects." Their message was simple: we are all connected, and we can live together in harmony in this ever-changing world.

1967: As a 5th grade teacher in Mamaroneck, New York, I designed a unit called "Heritage, U.S.A." to help my students explore their roots. Through their ancestors, they discovered they were linked to many parts of the world.

1970: As a middle school social studies teacher in Larchmont, New York, I helped plan a unit on "Poverty in America." Through daily newspaper accounts of poverty and many other activities, students came to see that common problems, like poverty, link us to the rest of the world.

1975: As a high school social studies teacher in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, I found the opportunities to link our community to Africa and the rest of the world to be unlimited. In one world history class, for example, my 9th graders read relevant materials and listened to neighbors who had

The more the students learn about other cultures, the more they learn about their own and the links that connect all of us.

lived or worked in South Africa in preparation for a debate on the resolution: *The United States should withdraw all economic ties with South Africa.*

In U.S. history class, my students learned of their community's links to the world when a panel of immigrants told of their journeys to America and how their native cultures differ from American culture. In another unit, Vietnam veterans shared their experiences and attitudes about war; again, students learned of still another connection our communities have to the world—one that unfortunately seems to occur far too frequently.

1986—Now: As a college teacher in the education department at North Ad-

ams State College in North Adams, Massachusetts, I have shared with my students these and many more ideas for integrating global and multicultural perspectives into existing social studies curriculums. I've found that most of these ideas share two common threads. First, they involve bringing community members into the schools as resources, as "experts," enabling students to become interviewers, hosts, problem solvers, and active participants in the learning. Second, the more the students learn about other cultures, the more they learn about their own and the links that connect all of us.

The Seeds of the "Links" Concept

During my first year at North Adams, I attended a conference on "Bringing the Third World to Campus and Community." The speaker, Jack Hamilton, a Washington journalist, proposed that teachers internationalize the curriculum, either by creating new courses or by incorporating into existing courses strategies for enabling students to discover relationships between their towns and developing nations. He suggested, for example, that journalism students do research in their college communities and write articles for the local paper describing the links they discovered, thereby educating the

public as well. Each chapter in Hamilton's (1988) book, *Main Street America and the Third World*, describes different local links: banks, hospitals, colleges, and restaurants, for example.

What inspired Hamilton's crusade for a local perspective on news about developing countries? He was concerned that many people weren't reading his or other reporters' stories about such faraway places because they seemed irrelevant to their lives. So he began experimenting with the "links" concept. Hattiesburg, Mississippi, was the laboratory Hamilton chose to test his theory that, even in the smallest towns, links to developing nations not only exist but are a vital part of the lives of people in the community. In Hattiesburg, he uncovered all kinds of connections: business, economic, cultural, educational, political, and agricultural. Eventually, he concluded that if it's true in Hattiesburg, then it must be true nearly everywhere! (See Hamilton and Sutherland 1983, pp. 14-17.)

The Links Idea in Action

Upon returning from the conference, I offered my student teachers the option of designing an original unit of instruction around the links theme. Five of them chose to try it, and together we brainstormed strategies. Later, after learning techniques for doing field research from a sociology teacher, they consulted local newspapers and

telephone books. Soon they were making phone calls, visiting businesses, and interviewing people who could reveal the local links. To their surprise, the links were *everywhere*.

- A major factory had ties with Mexico.

- The local Catholic church sponsored friendship projects in Haiti.

- The owner of a gift shop made frequent buying trips to Guatemala.

- A neighboring college hosted several Asian and African students each year while the students completed master's degrees.

- Faculty members at North Adams State originated from Nigeria, China, and Iran.

- Local high schools sponsored exchange students.

- Immigrant families from Vietnam and China ran local restaurants.

- Several professors and students had traveled abroad.

- Two local museums were, or soon would be, hosting exhibits from other countries (cultural and artistic links).

- Car dealerships offered imports from Germany, Japan, Sweden, and England.

- A yearly local Italian-American festival included activities sponsored by various ethnic groups in the community.

The list seemed endless, and the student teachers had only scratched the surface. Because they could not possibly address all they had uncovered, their greatest task was deciding

Having already used the community around the college as their "library" for designing their units, the student teachers continued to tap this resource as they began teaching.

on the scope and sequence for their units. While the students varied the perspectives of their individual units, they pooled their resources, narrowing the scope to three types of links: business, educational, and cultural. First, they described the nature of each link and then explored the culture of each of the developing countries with whom the links existed.

Having already used the community around the college as their "library" for designing their units, they continued to tap this resource as they began teaching. From the local library they gathered folktales and stories from the relevant countries. They invited community members into the classrooms where they were student-teaching to talk about their native countries. Some taught songs, dances, and games; others shared slides and presented artifacts.

To make a long story short, the practicing teachers were as excited about the results as their elementary students were. Some even heard reports from parents that their children were so engaged in the unit that their enthusiasm carried over at home. One activity the whole family had gotten involved in, reported one parent, was "discover the world in your closet." After listing all their clothing items and where each one was made, they then

Fig. 1. Steps in Constructing a Links Curriculum

Students of all ages will enjoy and benefit from activities that illustrate the links between them and the rest of the world. Here are possible steps that the teacher and students might follow:

1. Brainstorm links you already know about. Then respond to the list of questions that will help you think of still more links (see fig. 2).
2. Decide what research committees you want to organize, perhaps three or four committees, each one pursuing a different category of links—for example, one on business links, another on educational links.
3. Decide which tasks each committee member will pursue: do necessary research, conduct interviews, invite speakers to class, check out resources such as newspapers for links, organize a field trip, prepare a display, take photographs in ethnic neighborhoods, and so on.
4. Meet in committees to share your findings and help each other.
5. Research the countries with whom links exist.
6. Prepare presentations on countries and the links.
7. Present the projects in class and beyond.

Fig. 2. Local Links to Developing Countries and the World

Are you aware of the links to other countries that exist in your own community? Next to each question, try to identify by name a link in your community that might be useful to your students in their search for knowledge about developing countries and the world. Have your students fill out this questionnaire also. The individuals identified could be guest speakers or subjects of interviews.

<i>Nature of the Link</i>	<i>Name</i>
A. Community/Family Links	
1. Immigrants living in your town/city?	
2. Family members (related to your students) who come from another country?	
3. People who are familiar with immigrant groups that settled in your area?	
4. Veterans of military service?	
B. Educational/Recreational Links	
1. Faculty in schools/colleges in your area who come from another country?	
2. Students who come from another country?	
3. Students/faculty who have traveled to other countries?	
4. Teams that have players from other countries?	
5. Teams that have traveled to other countries to play?	
6. Peace Corps returnees?	
C. Environmental Links	
1. Experts who can discuss global/local environmental problems such as pollution or acid rain?	
D. Business/Trade/Industrial Links	
1. Small businesses that import goods (gift shops, for example)?	
2. Large businesses that import/export goods (factories, for example)?	
3. Banks?	
4. Ethnic restaurants?	
5. Rotary Club exchanges?	
E. Religious/Social Links	
1. World religions in your community?	
2. Church/synagogue organizations with links to other countries?	
3. Festivals that celebrate origins?	
4. Organizations attempting to solve local problems related to hunger, homelessness, and refugee placement?	
F. Medical Links	
1. Hospitals with doctors/nurses from other countries?	
2. Experts on global diseases (AIDS, for example)?	
3. Experts on good/bad drugs coming in and going out of this country?	
4. Experts familiar with population issues?	
G. Cultural Links	
1. Visiting artists/performers in your community?	
2. Museums with exhibits from other countries?	
3. Plays/films from other countries?	
4. Musical groups from other countries?	
5. Sister City visitors?	

located the places on a map to see where their "closet links" were.

Members of the Human Family

Since I introduced the links concept in 1986, each semester a few of my teacher education students have opted to do a links unit. (See figs. 1 and 2 for suggestions about developing a links curriculum.) In each unit a new scope-and-sequence appears, with the same rewarding results:

- motivated students—for whom learning becomes meaningful because they can see connections among the disciplines;

- motivated students—for whom learning becomes relevant because they can see the connections between what they are learning in school and real people, places, and issues in their own communities;

- motivated students—who become socially responsive citizens interested in knowing and working with their neighbors on local projects to make a difference in the quality of life in the community they all share.

At the very least, the links approach, and other social studies curriculums that foster local and global awareness, can help students of all ages learn more about themselves and their own communities. And, at the very most, such approaches can provide the foundation for developing socially responsible individuals who recognize that step one in solving common problems is to see themselves connected around the globe, members of the human family. □

References

- Hamilton, J. M. (1988). *Main Street America and the Third World*. Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press.
- Hamilton, J. M., and F. Sutherland. (July/August 1983). "The News of the World Is Right Here on Main Street." *The Quill*.
- Zaret, H., and L. Singer. (1947). *Little Songs on Big Subjects*. New York: Argosy Records.

Roselle Kline Chartock is Assistant Professor of Education, North Adams State College, North Adams, MA 01247.

Copyright © 1991 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.