

GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALITY

By

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What will the world be like for the children that will graduate from high school in the year 2000? This question is not new, nor is it likely the first time the reader has encountered it, but it is a critical question to keep firmly in mind for those of us that are charged with educating children. It is also an implicit question that runs throughout this issue of the, Iowa Council For The Social Studies Journal. Although the nature of this article and its space limitations are not designed to fully answer this question, this article will attempt to illuminate and clarify one aspect of the question - interdependence - and to offer several instructional strategies that introduce students to various aspects of this important concept.

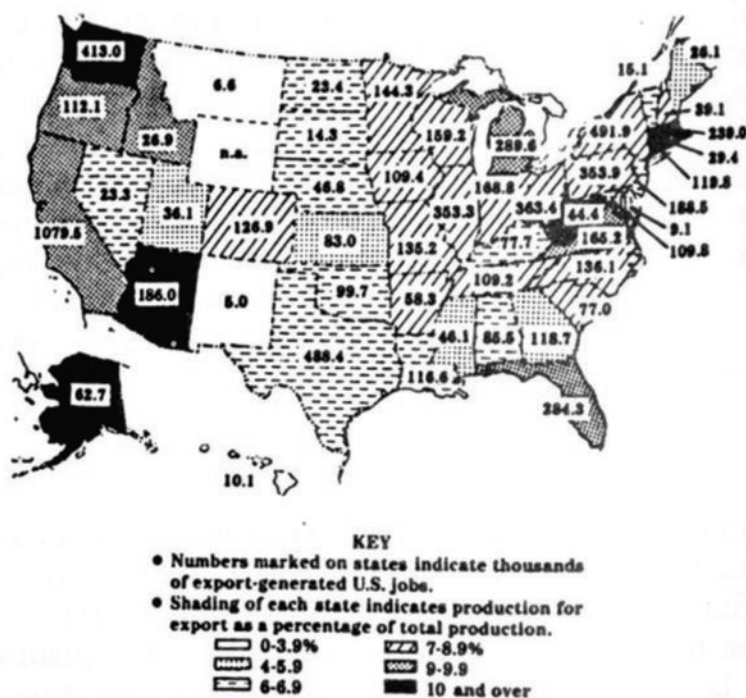
Interdependence

Interdependence is a fact. Yet few people understand its profound impact on their personal lives, much less, its impact on the economic, political, and social dimensions of the international system in which all countries participate. For instance, foreign trade between the years 1954 - 1963 averaged 7.9 percent of the GNP, by 1980 this figure was 21 percent of the GNP, and in 1987 it was 26 percent and most analysts see this figure growing in the future (Hamilton and Roberts, 1989, p.222). In 1985 alone, manufactured exports to the U.S. from the newly industrial nations (NICs) in east Asia - Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, were three fourths of the exports from the European community's ten members (Hamilton and Roberts, 1989, p.222). All of this indicates that in a very short period of time the world's economy has evolved into a truly global one where the U.S. and other western nations have become dependent on many countries. For example, in 1985, one third of all U.S. manufacturing exports went

to Latin America, the four Asian NIC's, and other countries in the third world. Ultimately, these and other trading relationships result in millions of jobs for people in the U.S. (Hamilton and Roberts, 1989, p.223). The magnitude of this is depicted below in Figure 1. (Maxwell and Roberts, p.222, 1989).

U.S. Export Reliance: U.S. Jobs Linked to U.S. Production for Export, by State, 1981

The United States was not immune to the problems of other countries when the global recession began. More than 8 per cent of total U.S. output—produced by 7.4 million U.S. workers—was exported in 1981. Heavily populated states were the most export-reliant and therefore the most seriously affected states.



Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, *Michigan State Exports* (1984) Table 3; and 1981 *Annual Survey of Manufactures: Origin of Exports of Manufactured Products* (1983), Table 2a.

Interdependence among nations is not just an economic phenomena it has a direct bearing on the political and social domains of the international system. It has created an incredible array of political and social transactions among states which has resulted in a vast web of interdependent and dependent linkages among states (Lamy, 1987, p.38). The growing multi-state system is one where political and economic power is increasingly defused. Gone are the days where the U.S. and the Soviet Union along with their satellites had extreme economic and political influence on world affairs. This

is not to indicate that the two super powers do not play a significant role in the international system, for they do. However, since the late 1960's the international system has become more plural in terms of states with power and influence (Lamy, 1987, p.41). Similarly, decision making in an interdependent multi-state system is no longer confined to just government actors. Increasingly non-state actors such as the Catholic church, Amnesty International, United Nations, World Bank, multinational corporations, and hundreds of other non-governmental organizations play a significant role in advising governments and formulating transnational responses to global problems and issues. Given these complex and interacting relationships the problems of one country can easily become problems for all.

Given the realities of interdependence, clearly America's interests can not be separated from the interests of the Soviet citizen's pursuit of economic reform, in Perestroika, or the Chinese people's quest for democracy, or South Africa's struggling to abolish apartheid. What can we do as teachers to educate students about interdependence so that they may begin to understand the world in which they live? The following instructional strategies have been designed to sensitize students to the realities of global interdependence at several levels.

Community/Global Linkages and Interdependence

Investigating international linkages at the community level is a good way to expand students' awareness of how their lives are affected by international interdependence. Generally students know more about their community than they do about the world so investigating the world from the vantage point of the local community is a good place to start. At this level students can be assigned to investigate a variety of organizations in their community. Most communities have a number of linkages with the world. It is not unusual to find restaurants that offer international cuisine, branch offices of corporations that are multi-national, fraternal/service organizations that make donations to a variety of global concerns, educational institutions which have programs directed at international concerns and have student exchange programs, media that

deal with global concerns daily, and churches that regularly conduct charitable work on a global scale.

Community/Global Linkages ¹

Organization	International Activities	Importance to Community
CIVIC		
RELIGIOUS		
RECREATIONAL		
ECONOMIC		
MASS MEDIA		
EDUCATION		

One strategy is to have students construct a matrix similar to the one depicted above for use in their community investigations. The type of community in which students live will, to a certain extent, dictate the parameters of the categories so it is important for the teacher and class to clarify the range of community phenomena to be included under each category in the matrix. For example, does recreational include cultural events like theater, symphonies, and art galleries or is it to be confined to outdoor activities such as sports, etc? What is to be included under the mass media heading?

Next students need to have access to the "Yellow Pages" of the telephone directory. It is loaded with information about the community and students will need to use this source to gain information about the various organizations that have international linkages. Several students in the class would be assigned to one of six topics in the matrix. For example, students who are investigating economic linkages would use the "Yellow Pages" to identify manufacturers that seem to have international affiliations. Another group would identify various restaurants that specialize in ethnic cuisine to be included as part of their list under recreational links. Still

another group could identify various civic groups that have international linkages. Students would be assigned to contact these organizations to set up either a telephone or personal interview to get an explanation of their international activities. Each group would be required to make a list of interview questions in advance, so to help insure that they conduct a quality interview. Students would need some guidance as they do not have sufficient knowledge about global interdependence. The following questions identify broad areas for students to investigate. Obviously these questions will need to be modified by the teacher and students to fit the particular needs of the community and the nature of the project.

- What are the types of linkages organizations have with the world?
- How would the community be impacted if many of the linkages were to disappear?
- What groups would benefit from reduced linkages? What groups would be harmed?
- How would the reduction of linkages impact the people in the country we are linked too?
- What, if any, do international/community linkages contribute to the quality of life in the community?
- How do the international affiliations impact our community's social, economic, and cultural functions?
- Why do international linkages exist between our community and the world?
- What would you predict will happen in the future concerning our community and its global linkages?

Once students have finished their interviews each student or group would be required to write a report on their findings. Each group would then write a brief synopsis of all the reports in their group and report this information to the class.

In addition to this activity students would be assigned to monitor local radio and television news programs and read the local newspaper. Students' analysis of these sources would provide additional insights into international/community linkages. Students would be assigned to watch the local news and identify stories that portray international linkages. For both news programs and newspaper articles, students would be asked to keep a record which

might include the name of the news program or article, description of the news story, and the community/global linkage.

When the class had heard from each of the six groups and had identified relevant news items, a class discussion could be held about the impact of interdependence on their community. The teacher should use the questions that students used during their interviews to organize and orchestrate various subtleties relating to community linkages to the world. As a culminating activity to the study of community links to the world, the teacher should acquire a large map of the world and some colored yarn. Students would be instructed visually to link their community to the world by connecting their community to points on the map identified during the investigation. The end result would be a dramatic visual evidence of community links to the world.

These activities require students to wrestle with various dimensions of the global condition and to appreciate that collectively people's actions have the potential to positively or negatively impact people in other countries.

Interdependence and Transnational Responses

While it is important that students are aware of how interdependence affects their lives and the community in which they live, it is also important that students understand the relationship of interdependence to political behavior in the international system. An interesting and convenient way to introduce this idea is to have students study transnational responses to global issues and problems. A way to approach this lesson would be to have students collect newspaper stories about international issues or problems and analyze them from the perspective of the various actions taken by participants in the international system. For example, an instructor could use the National Directory of Addresses and Telephone Numbers, which contains a section listing daily newspapers in the U.S. with circulations of over 50,000. Each student could be assigned to select from the directory a newspaper from a different part of the country and write a letter requesting a complementary copy of the paper for a specific date. Upon receipt of the newspaper each student would bring it to class for sharing and analysis.

A classroom survey would be taken to measure the frequency of stories appearing on the front page of the national newspapers. The three topics being cited most often would become the subject of the class investigation. For example, if this activity were conducted at the time of this writing, undoubtedly one of the top stories would have been the quest for democracy in the Peoples Republic of China. For the purposes of illustration, I will use this story as the content for the sample lesson below.

Students are placed in groups. Each group is instructed to read the news accounts about China and make a list of all the actions taken by various governments and actions by non-governmental organizations. Their list might include the following:

News Items About China

- Siemens, A. G., the West German electronics conglomerate and Owens-Corning Fiberglass evacuated their employees from China, with no plans to return in the near future.
- Foreign corporations for the past decade had committed \$255 billion to 16,000 enterprises in China. No new investments planned in conditions of uncertainty.
- World Bank and International Development Banks holds up to \$200 million in development loans and is considering holding up an additional 1.4 billion.
- 100 Japanese firms, including Toshiba, Mitsui and Mitsubishi, indefinitely postponed the inauguration of a project to promote Japanese investment in China.
- The European Community suspended high-level contacts with Chinese leaders, including the Foreign Trade Minister.
- London based Euromarkets price of \$1 billion issues of Chinese bonds plunged and officials could not determine at what price the bond issue would close.

- \$2.2 billion a year Chinese tourism industry has wilted.
- Many governments continue to ban sales of high technology to China.
- Chinese economists predict inflation will rise 40 percent and production will decrease dramatically.
- South Korean trade with China has slowed significantly.
- Britain announced that all Sino-British ministerial exchanges and military contacts were suspended, all arm sales banned and the cancellation of the Prince and Princess of Wales trip to China in November, 1989.
- Hong Kong citizens call for a review of negotiations of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.
- Australian Consulate in Hong Kong reports that inquiries for emigration has doubled since the Beijing crack down.
- U.S. suspension of Military sales to China.
- U.S. offer to extend visas of more than 40,000 Chinese citizens in the U.S.
- U.S. Embassy in Beijing grants "temporary refuge" to China's most prominent dissident, astrophysicist Fang Lizhi.
- U.S. suspends high level contacts between U.S. and Chinese officials.

Next each group would be instructed to classify the items listed as either official government actions or actions by non-governmental organizations. Once this was completed students would be instructed to evaluate each action in terms of what impact it will have on China, and the nation and/or organization sponsoring it. Next each group would write a brief summary and report to the class. Students' answers could be written on the chalk board or combined into a handout. In either case, the information would

serve as a basis for further investigation concerning the impact of transnational responses on China, its sponsors, and future developments that flow from these actions.

Conclusion

While two lessons on a topic of interdependence are insufficient to teach about all aspects of interdependence, they serve as a starting point as students begin to develop a perspective about life on this planet that transcends the nation's boundaries and recognizes that collectively people's actions have both the potential to positively or negatively impact people in other countries.

Endnotes

1. The idea and six discriptors for this activity came from Robert B. Woyach's article "Using the Local Community to Teach About the Global Community," Community Study: Applications and Opportunities, National Council For The Social Studies, (Washington D.C., 1984).

References

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