TEACHING FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

By

Anita DeKock
Craig Paul

The library chairs were placed in a tight circle. Participants pushed back to ponder; others leaned forward to listen more intently. The issues were weighty--matters of war and peace, resource scarcity, human rights and equity; the discussion thoughtful and earnest; the tone serious and intent. One might have expected a high-level, multinational summit with senior statesmen and diplomats, three-piece suits, briefcases, a highly polished walnut conference table, and the smell of expensive cigars.

Not so. These participants wore faded, acid-washed jeans and teeshirts advertising everything from Coke to Iowa Hawkeyes. Their sneakers--mostly Reeboks and Adidas--alternately kicked the notebooks and papers piled on the floor beneath their chairs or the feet of the person seated next to them. The room smelled not of wood polish and leather but, appropriately enough, of chalk dust and hot lunch. The carpet was slightly worn and the chairs bore initials scratched with pencils during a not-so-interesting film many years before. These thinkers were nine- and ten-year-olds. Discussion centered on their visual depictions of the state of the world. The colored marker masterpieces, which they held and described, showed a world split and divided, subjected to the brutality of war, famine, and pollution. In language of ten-year-olds they spoke eloquently of homelessness, hunger, and inequity. Discussion revealed their personal sense of responsibility. This was not someone else's world and someone else's problems. This was their world and problems they would address. They spoke hopefully of people working together to right the wrongs and create a better, safer world.

These children were living, breathing, incontrovertible evidence the world is smaller and larger than ever before. Their clothes and games and toys and rock music connect them easily with

Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. But even as media and the consumer economy shrink the world, opportunity to travel and the inevitability of global interaction grows larger and larger. Watching and listening to this group of students, it is obvious they are deeply involved in the world. The question is: Have we, as educators, faced this fact? Will todays ten-year-olds be prepared to live productive lives as twenty-first century adults?

Teachers, administrators, and parents in Muscatine, Iowa, are searching for ways to insure a positive response to that question. A significant part of the answer, we believe, is that students must develop a worldwide perspective. It is important for students to know the state of the world and how the United States fits in, but additionally they must be able to communicate with people of different cultures and learn to accept and appreciate the world's diversity. Such knowledge obviously goes well beyond the kind of information about names and places so often surveyed by public polls and questionnaires. This type of education challenges students to take the names, places, and myriad of facts about world issues and (1) contemplate their roles and stakes in all of this and (2) consider how best to pursue their dreams and desired outcomes through the jumble of governmental and nongovernmental avenues available. Providing these skills is the essence of global education. (Alger and Harf, 1986)

A Picture of Global Education

What would a district globally educating its students look like? We think Muscatine's schools provide the broad strokes and basic outline of such a picture. (Yet much detail remains to be added.) From a Muscatine classroom teacher's perspective, global education is as much or more a change of vision or perception as it is a change of activities or curriculum. It means looking quite intentionally for ways to connect what is taught to the rest of the world: reading short stories from many countries--not just Europe and the United States; analyzing the perspective on global issues found in foreign as well as US newspapers and periodicals; and giving students the fundamental knowledge of geography and world history to understand current issues. It is food fairs and world days organized not to show "quaint customs" but rather to heighten interest in, and appreciation of, the world's diversity and the efforts of different cultures' to meet human needs. It is organizing oppor-

tunities for students to study such issues as pollution, human rights, and world hunger and then providing forums where they can discuss these issues and grapple with the implications of proposed solutions. Obviously such activities are not the domain of any single grade level, subject, or curricular area. All teachers can find ways to add a global perspective to material they are teaching. Global education is purposefully acknowledging the obvious: you are part of an interconnected and interdependent world and you need to know how to operate in it.

From a student's viewpoint a global education would provide basic knowledge in history, geography, world cultures and religions, language training, and global issues, and would afford opportunities to develop leadership skills and to think about and discuss issues. In the best of cases it would involve opportunities to travel abroad and interact with people whose experiences are very different from their own. Muscatine tries to provide such opportunities from the earliest years of elementary school through high school. International visitors in the classroom, issues conferences, participation in Model United Nations activities, leadership workshops, exchanges with students at the United Nations International School in New York, exchanges with students from other countries, and student/faculty trips to Japan are examples of how Muscatine is trying to do these very things.

From an administrative, or district, point of view, global education means a commitment to making a global perspective an integral part of curriculum development. In Muscatine commitment extends to the use of release time and discretionary funds for a K-12 global education task force. The Muscatine Global Education Task Force--composed of teachers from each building and administrators--is devising ways to instruct their peers on global education issues and create and compile teacher-tested materials for classroom use.

All of these elements give a picture of global education in Muscatine. But, it didn't happen overnight. The programs and attitudes now in place are the result of years of hard work by a number of people both in and out of the school system. More than fifteen years ago the Stanley Foundation, a private operating foundation dedicated to working toward a secure peace with freedom and justice, began working with interested teachers. Through

the years a loosely-knit consortium of educators defined, redefined, and expanded their own understanding of the goals of global education. In the words of Jan Drum, vice president of the foundation, "The foundation's role was to give teachers time and support to think about what they really wanted to see happen for the kids they cared about. Then together we determined what of that they could really do."

That approach seems obvious--yet so revolutionary: Thinking about what we would like to give particular students and then finding ways to meet those goals. The community of Muscatine would not appear at first glance to be particularly unique or revolutionary. It is a small (pop. 26,000 with 5,600 students K-12), basically homogenous river town in the middle of the middle west. Despite the presence of a Hispanic community of significant size, only a small fraction of the population speaks something other than English as a first language. We are very much middle America.

What sets the district apart is the emphasis placed on process as well as product in the area of global education. Developing a global perspective is a major part of the district's statement of mission and philosophy--equal in weight to learning the three Rs. This statement was developed by parents, teachers, school board members, and administrators and was adopted by the school board. We have thought about what we want for our students and are now trying to make those plans real. Five important elements make up this process: partnerships, networking, teacher ownership of the process, school board and administrative support, and state initiatives.

Partnerships. As previously noted, for more than fifteen years the Stanley Foundation has worked with Muscatine teachers. The foundation provides materials, speakers, ideas, and plain old moral support for interested educators. It assisted teachers in attending summer workshops and training sessions and was instrumental in turning the dream of Global Education Task Force into a reality. Although this long-term partnership had the largest effect, other partnerships have recently played important parts. Through an adopt-a-school consortium, local businesses and industries, many of which operate internationally, have complemented school programming by providing globally knowledgeable speakers and resources. By bringing visitors from other countries to Muscatine, the Sister

Cities organization has helped establish ties to Europe, Asia, and South America, thus heightening student interest in the world beyond Muscatine County. Through their efforts, Muscatine High School enjoys a sister school relationship with Ichikawadaimon High School in Yamanashi Prefecture in Japan.

Networking. An unexpected, but extremely worthwhile, benefit of the Global Education Task Force is the networking which it has engendered. For districts to find opportunities for teachers to get together to share ideas and to support each other's efforts is difficult. When this does happen, it is usually between or among teachers at the same level--elementary, middle, or high school. The multicategorical makeup of the K-12 task force established beneficial connections between teachers at different grade levels and among many disciplines.

Many Muscatine teachers actively participate in the activities of the Iowa Global Education Association. This group's activities also afford opportunities to find out what is happening and what is working in classrooms across Iowa.

Teacher ownership. People nationwide are now talking about the need to infuse teaching with a global perspective. It has not always been so. Long before the task force, or the district's mission and philosophy statement, or demonstrated support for global education at the district level, there were teachers teaching students what they would need to know about living in a highly interdependent global village. Often these teachers were doing so without much, if any, support from their principals or peers. With support from a few peers and the support and encouragement of the Stanley Foundation, they continued. Teachers can rightfully boast of ownership of the global education models which exist in Muscatine today. This is not a case of state or district mandates coming from the top down, but rather Muscatine is an example of efforts bubbling from the bottom up to energize the district.

School board and administrative support. By adopting the mission and philosophy statement, by making a global perspective a criteria for curriculum development, by providing school time for the task force to do its work, and by using discretionary funds to support teachers writing curriculum in this area, the school board and administration have taken their support of global education out of

the realm of mere verbal assent into the real world of action and implementation. The level and degree of support has varied over the past twenty years through the terms of many superintendents and boards of directors. It is tribute to the persistence of all involved that progress has steadily continued.

State initiatives. Those involved in agriculture know first hand how events in other parts of the world directly affect their lives and livelihood. So perhaps it is not surprising that Iowa, a leader in both education and agriculture, would mandate global education. The state standard which goes into effect in July 1989 calls for each school board to "... adopt a plan which incorporates global perspectives into all areas and levels of the educational program ..." The Iowa Global Education Association worked persistently and tirelessly to see that this element became one of the state's mandated standards.

Conclusion

Muscatine's experience is not the be-all/end-all for global education, but is does suggest the value of teachers and communities persistently asking themselves, "What will these students need to know to live productive lives?" In addition, it shows the value of teachers owning and designing educational programs; the benefits to all of district support of teacher leadership in curriculum development; the many and varied payoffs of networking with agencies, businesses, and foundations--not to mention other teachers at different levels--in furthering educational opportunities; and, perhaps most importantly, the need to remind ourselves that education, as a process, always needs to be moving ahead.

There it is: a snapshot of global education efforts in Muscatine. Like a polaroid picture, our efforts are slowly developing from dim images and outlines into a clearly defined picture of what education could/should be. The development is not yet complete. But the elements are there, and we look forward to watching our vision of global education emerge.

References

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Anita DeKock is a Project Coordinator in the Educator Support Division of The Stanley Foundation.

Craig Paul is principal at Muscatine High School in Muscatine, Iowa.