

Learning and Living a Global Perspective

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Introduction

The WVU Extension Service and West Virginia citizens are recognizing increasingly that meeting the needs of the state's children, youth, families, and communities can no longer be understood or addressed from a strictly local or regional perspective. West Virginia is part of an increasingly interdependent world. The state's current and future needs are best understood within a global context. Each of us should try to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for global citizenship and understand the concept of thinking globally and acting locally.

The growing interrelatedness of life across borders has increased the need for citizens to possess the knowledge and sensitivity required to comprehend the global dimensions of political, economic, and cultural issues and problems. Our nation's security, prosperity, and way of life depend in large part on our ability to develop the capacity to comprehend international, cross-cultural interactions and to participate constructively in decisions influencing foreign policy and relationships (National Council for Social Studies, "Position Statement, 1982").

The intent of this lesson is to increase participants' understanding of what it means to have a global perspective and to help them develop their knowledge, skills, and participation as global citizens.

What Is a Global Perspective?

Global perspective emphasizes the interconnection among human beings and societies throughout our planet. In order to develop a global perspective, we need to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism, and increasing interdependence. A global perspective constitutes an

"awareness of the diversity of ideas and practices to be found in human societies around the world, of how such ideas and practices compare, and including some limited recognition of how the ideas and ways of one's own society might be viewed from other vantage points" (Robert G. Hanvey).

Major Global Issues and Challenges

In their reference guide prepared for the American Forum for Global Education, Collins, Czara, and Smith point out that global education should provide youths and adults with "information and intellectual tools—coupled with the willingness to use them—that enable them to function as competent American citizens in a complex and rapidly changing international environment."

But how do we determine the major global issues, problems, and challenges that require our knowledge and skill development? Collins, Czara, and Smith's in-depth study identifies 10 categories that should be scrutinized, discussed, and better understood. The guiding principles are embodied in two concepts, change and interdependence.

Here are their 10 categories: Conflict and Its Control, Economic Systems, Human Rights and Social Justice/Human Needs and Quality of Life, Planet Management, Political Systems, Population, Race and Ethnicity, The Technocratic Revolution, and Sustainable Development.

Neither schools nor individuals have the time and resources needed to become knowledgeable about all of these issues. But we can strive in our formal and informal learning to develop the skills and techniques needed to explore these global issues, problems, and challenges. Extension Services can play an important role.

Some Things We Can Learn and Do

It is unrealistic to think that we can become global citizens overnight, or that suddenly we can become transformed into outspoken global education advocates. But we can be receptive to opportunities to expand our global perspectives, to speak out when social justice principles are violated in our immediate surroundings, and above all, to help children and youth understand their relationship to the larger picture. For example, most of us may find the following illustration surprising.

A Summary of the World:

If we could shrink the Earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this:

- There would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (North and South), and 8 Africans.
- 51 would be female; 49 would be male.
- 70 would be nonwhite; 30 white.
- 70 would be non-Christian; 30 Christian.
- 50 percent of the entire world's wealth would be in the hands of only 6 people and all 6 would be citizens of the United States.
- 80 would live in substandard housing.
- 70 would be unable to read.
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition.
- 1 would be near death; 1 would be near birth.
- Only 1 would have a college education.
- No one would own a computer.

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for both tolerance and understanding becomes glaringly apparent (*Dealing with Differences*, Marion O'Malley and Tiffany Davis).

It is easy to underestimate the magnitude of diversity permeating our world. People naturally operate in relationship to their immediate environment; many of us interact primarily with people who seem like us. A global perspective helps us to see our world more accurately. We are judgmental beings; that is part of human nature. We tend to judge and assess people and attitudes that are different from our own. We are not likely to stop being judgmental, to refrain from drawing an opinion about how another person looks or behaves, good or bad.

However, learning to expand our global perspective can help us give less weight to our judgments. We can be more accepting of differences and more capable of looking beyond the surface where true similarities lie.

Some of the following activities and information may be helpful to you as we explore how to cultivate a global perspective in our lives. These materials may be useful for integrating into activities in our club; in church, synagogue or mosque; with our family; or in personal reflection.

Our Own Roots

Who were our ancestors? Where did they come from? What were they like? Knowing the answers can increase our understanding of who we are. Helping our loved ones, especially children and youths, address these questions can build a foundation for their global perspective. These activities also will increase your knowledge of history.

Sample Activities

1. Learn about or share your family's genealogy.
2. Learn or share what growing up was like as children.
3. Talk with relatives and friends about their and your favorite foods as children.
4. Find out all you can about the year one of your grandparents was born.
5. Write a history about the house you live in or a house built in your family at least 50 years ago. Include information about the people who lived there.
6. Plan your own project of special relevance to your roots.

(*Exploring*, WVU Extension Service publication 4-H-M-2251-83)

Life in Other Countries

Not all of us have the opportunity to travel abroad or go to that "country of our dreams." Nevertheless, virtual trips to other countries are available through books, video, and the Internet. Select one country you want to visit and begin exploring. Countless books, periodicals, and encyclopedias are available to help you explore. Here are some Internet sources that are particularly useful.

Library of Congress Country Studies
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>

This site offers interesting studies of 85 countries. It contains a wealth of information about all facets of life in each country.

The United Nations Cyber School Bus
<http://www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus/>

This site features profiles of cities worldwide, information on 185 countries, pictures from around the world, global trends with graphs and charts, and flags of all the UN member nations. There is even a country quiz (and answers).

Guatemala

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/links/index.html>

The Peace Corps' Web site has many resources for teachers, students, and others. Their World Wise Schools provide links to every country served by Peace Corps volunteers. West Virginia Community Educational Outreach Service (CEOS) clubs and members have expressed special interest in rural Guatemala recently. They have conducted two donation drives to help low-income Guatemalan communities where WVU Extension is conducting projects. Guatemala also hosts Peace Corps volunteers. The Peace Corps provides an abundance of links for those wishing to learn more about Guatemalan culture, history, government, law, languages, Maya Indians, etc.

Mexico

<http://city.net/countries/mexico/>

West Virginia CEOS has provided scholarships for two WVU international students from Mexico in recent years, Leticia Bravo and Celina Melgoza. Members have demonstrated a special interest in the arts and crafts, food, social issues, culture, geography, and tourism of our neighboring country to the south. This Web site is filled with information on Mexico. In addition, Internet enthusiasts can click onto the site (<http://city.net/countries/>) and select any other country or territory.

Cooking

International recipes galore are easily accessible in books and magazines. The United Nations

Bookshop's Web site (<http://www.un.org/Pubs/bookshop/cookbook/cookbook.htm>) includes a unique section devoted to international cookbooks. You will find titles organized by different countries and regions of the world.

Raising Our Consciousness

We need to increase our awareness of how our stereotypes, inferences, and opinions influence how we see people who appear different from us. The exercise below can help us broaden our perspective of people from other cultures and to think globally. It would be good to invite a few persons of other cultures to be present and to respond after the small group work.

Eye of the Beholder

Materials

Newsprint and Markers

Advance Preparation

The list below is written on a sheet of newsprint. If the group is very large and will be divided into small groups in several locations, it will be necessary to prepare several sheets. The list may also be written on a centrally located chalkboard.

African women...	Middle Eastern women...
Black American women...	Japanese women...
Hispanic women...	Native American women...
Chinese women...	Russian women...
Asian women...	American women...

Procedure

Divide participants into small groups of three to six persons, each with access to a sheet of newsprint. The task of each group will be to complete each sentence on the list. Give each small group 10 minutes to write down all the endings of the sentences they can think of; for examples, "Japanese women wear kimonos" or "Chinese women have bound feet." After completing the 10-minute session, the small groups should reconvene into a single large group. Participants then discuss their responses and how they feel about them.

The guests (who have been observers in small groups) are invited to share their perspectives and feelings as they hear themselves bring "described."

It may be helpful to write (or uncover) the Webster definition of stereotype on newsprint at this point: “a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group, and that represents an oversimplified opinion or attitude or an uncritical judgment.”

Then ask the group the following discussion questions:

1. Does that definition fit some of our responses?
2. Are most of our responses along the line of people’s differences or similarities?
3. Do we prevent ourselves from seeing persons as individuals? From seeing the many similarities between the world’s peoples?
4. What part do the media play?
5. What has this exercise taught me about myself?

Source: Adapted from material developed by The Bay Area Global Education Program, World Affairs Council, 312 Sutter St. #200, San Francisco, CA 94109.

Concluding Observations

Why should West Virginians learn about global issues, problems, and challenges? All evidence indicates that global issues and problems are growing and will neither go away nor resolve themselves. They require action and participation by citizens who are prepared and willing to deal with difficult and complex global issues. Students should leave school reasonably informed and concerned about one or more of the major global issues, problems, or challenges. Adults need to be sufficiently knowledgeable to prepare our children and youth.

“The acknowledgment of being members of a global community is lived, not just described... Those who have reached internationalization are actively involved on a daily basis in making the world a better place to live through personal as well as professional involvements” (Karla A. Anderson).

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Recommended Resources

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