

EDITORIAL

Towards an Education for Global Interdependence With Humanity and Dignity for All

IAN WINCHESTER
University of Calgary

In an earlier editorial in the Spring 2005 issue of JET it was suggested that our present and future global interdependence requires a number of new aims or principles for education in our time. In particular we ought to aim at providing for all students on this planet:

1. *an education that helps to bring about an ease of global communication;*
2. *an education that helps to banish or at least diminish nationalism, tribalism, and religious hatred by helping us to understand history and culture from the vantage point of others with tolerance of our differences;*
3. *an education that not only makes our natural scientific knowledge widespread but also our best understanding of ourselves and of others as conscious, moral, religious, musical, artistic, and literary beings;*
4. *an understanding of democratic government and governance that helps us to diminish international, intertribal, inter-religious, and inter-sexual tensions and that helps to increase our toleration of minority views and ways of life;*
5. *an education that encourages us to settle our disputes personally by reason and compassion and within and among our nation states according to the rule of law based equally on reason and compassion.*

This issue of the *Journal of Educational Thought* relates importantly to a number of these principles. But how would we actually educate for a globally interdependent world? And how would we do so in order that we increase our tolerance and understanding of those different from ourselves? For example, with respect to global intercommunication would we inculcate a particular *lingua franca*, or perhaps a selection of

globally important languages? Or would this be simply to impose on others a means of communication however convenient for the global community that diminishes their own powers rather than augments them? And if, on the contrary, we believed that a real augmentation of humanity was the result, what would we teach?

An interesting analysis in this general area of concern is offered by Hetty Roessingh. Roessingh discusses the mediative role of a teacher in the context of the teaching of a second international language to students. She points out that our prior picture of what it is to teach, for example, English as a second language has often been simply connected with the teaching of the language, its vocabulary and spelling, its pronunciation and its simple communication. But it has missed out on the larger contexts in which a language exists and flourishes. Thus the speaker may very well have a good pronunciation and a large vocabulary and efficient and accurate grammar and yet miss the communication of a prose or poetic or political text entirely. An education for ease in global communication requires both the latter and the former.

Even if we were to solve in some plausible way the task of educating everybody in some means or medium of global intercommunication, there still remains the task of global tolerance with its many aspects and faces. How do we get a handle on this given that most educational systems are run by nation states that usually glorify their own nation, their own ways, their own political systems, and their own religions?

One of our authors, Paul Parkison, has some plausible educational suggestions in this regard. Parkison in his discussion of the move to a pluralistic political vision in education suggests that shifting our educational paradigm to one that prioritizes the democratic mission and the demands of a pluralistic society will help to accomplish the grasp of principles like the second and fourth above. He suggests that this can be accomplished in practice by developing a critical awareness of our own groups and that of others by developing hermeneutic skills that differ radically from those we now inculcate, especially those associated with the assertion of certainty and validity for any one particular world view.

But a critical analysis of society or the capacity for such an analysis on the part of all of our students will not guarantee tolerance and compassion as virtues in the active life of a student. And without these virtues supplementing the rational and the critical virtues, how can we get along globally? One suggestion is that one awaken the immediate school community, one of the important communities in which most students live, to such tolerance and compassion.

And happily one of our authors in this issue, Gordon S. Gates, is concerned precisely with the task of awakening a school community of tolerance and compassion, surely a plausible aim for a school community concerned with providing an education of the sort which the above principles encourage. Gates suggests that we look to Buddhist principles of attention, interdependence, emptiness, and compassion. Such a suggestion is especially interesting for schools in North America and Europe where Christianity is the dominant background religion of most of those born or raised there. His arguments are well worth following and his suggestions equally well worth thinking about.

In his "Pedagogy of the Heart: Ruminations on Living Poetically" Carl Leggo treats us to an opportunity to think of ways to embody the third principle above, with its emphasis not only on scientific knowledge, but also on our moral, religious, artistic, and literary nature and understanding. In this article Leggo is a poet writing poetically about poetry and about living poetically. He shows us how living poetically, as he does, can illuminate many otherwise hidden aspects of our human experience. As he puts it at one point "I have lived for half a century and the one thread that winds through all my living is hope, the anticipation that we can learn to live together well in the world."

Finally Monique Bournot-Trites and co-author Joe Belanger suggests that far too many teachers, especially teacher-researchers place their conceptions of the good above the rights of the individual student. They suggest that in weaker but still inappropriate ways many classroom situations have analogies with the kind of treatment concentration camp prisoners received at the hands of Nazi doctors (for example: deliberate infection of wounds with gasoline, gangrene, and malaria; submerging prisoners in ice water; subjecting them to increases and decreases in air pressure until they died). It is incumbent upon us all to realize that our classrooms today are microcosms of humanity and that cultural misunderstanding, or the lack of a grasp of the uniqueness of the individual, are continuous with such mistreatment of Jews, homosexuals, and socialists at the hands of the Nazis. In a globally interdependent world such things can no longer be morally countenanced. And yet they are still going on more or less everywhere including: Biafra, the Sudan, Iraq and Iran, Zimbabwe, and even in the New Orleans of Hurricane Katrina.

Their conclusion is worth quoting here: "In a research world of untreated syphilis, undisclosed AIDS, preying on orphans, and misuse of blood samples, whether an anonymous student in an unidentifiable

classroom feels he or she has the absolute freedom to consent or not to consent to his or her everyday school work being reported as research might seem to be very far from a major issue, however, the first principle of the *Nuremberg Code* and basic tenet of all those [codes] that followed is respect for human dignity, a major component of which is free and informed consent."

Ian Winchester
Editor