

EDITORIAL

Globalization, Diversity, and an Education for a Democratic 21st Century

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What kind of education must be emphasized by our species in the 21st century if we are to survive to populate planets in the coming millennia around other suns elsewhere in the universe and so spread consciousness and intelligence to presently lifeless, thoughtless planetary systems?

I am thinking of the kind of education that the common school movement, a global movement, must engage in to help all of our children to grow up thinking of their species first, their planet second, and the long term future of both of these. By implication I am suggesting that both the various nationalisms of our time and those of the last century and a half must ultimately disappear in the common good. I am suggesting that humanity got off track in the 19th and 20th centuries in terrible ways with terrible consequences.

Ten thousand years ago, at the disappearance of the last ice age, our species was thinly scattered over the earth with perhaps the preponderance of humanity living in Africa and places nearby. Here in North America there were still horses, saber toothed tigers, and mammoths. But the technologies of killing and the organization of the people at that time here became too much for these beasts. And even the horse, which survived elsewhere, was likely killed off by newer and better human technology and organization for killing by the peoples who then inhabited North America..

In the 21st century our capacity for killing is millions of times more effective than it was 10,000 years ago. We are capable of killing off not only all of our own species, but most if not all of the other species that inhabit this planet with us as well. And even if we do manage to control our tribalisms, our nationalisms, and our hatred for those slightly different from ourselves and our own rous yet we know that we cannot

be on this planet forever and that our future as a species is ultimately off this planet and spreading over the visible universe in the next million years or so. The 21st century is the very first time (unless there were ancients before the last ice age that developed a civilization similar to our own and left no trace – an unlikely possibility since the last 10,000 years has been unusual climatically in that the world's climate has been remarkably stable during that time so permitting the development of agriculture and thus the development of cities) that our species has been able to judge the present and future consequences of our own cleverness, organizational capacity, and destructiveness.

We also live in the first era of a completely interdependent globe. For example, for the last 5,000 years the Chinese had been able to live in splendid isolation from the rest of the planet, suffering only occasional incursions from the north. It was protected in the north and northwest by mountains and deserts, in the west by the highest mountains in the world, and by seashore for most of the remainder. But today the Chinese government has recently bought oil reserves in Africa and is in the process of purchasing large shares in the Tar Sands in northeastern Alberta where there are oil reserves comparable to that of Saudi Arabia. The development of the possibility of private cars in China has made this a necessity with 1.3 billion potential drivers. Indeed, in 2004 China is already the third largest purchaser of private cars in the world. Nor is China completely self-sufficient in food, though great strides have been made. For example, China has also imported wheat from Canada and elsewhere since shortly after 1949. Canada, which for most of the last 100 years produced most of its own clothing, though importing cotton and wool, now depends more or less entirely on Asian countries for clothing manufacture. Canada and the United States have a heavily interdependent economy with respect to an enormous range of goods and services. Both Canada and the United States trade broadly with China importing as much or more than they sell. And similar stories could be told by all of the countries of the planet and their interdependence globally. Electronic interdependence is rising exponentially. For example telephone operators working on a particular day in Canada may actually be in India or vice versa. And the advent of the internet has meant that information is not locked into one language or culture but is broadly available to the world, provided one has the linguistic keys.

This new global interdependence is now almost total and the more developed a country is the more interdependent it is. For the underdeveloped there is now only starvation and handouts from the

developed parts of the world. The logic of this interdependence and what I take to be the ultimate necessity of our future on this planet and spreading throughout the universe means that we must somehow create ourselves as one people. In this regard a few countries are peculiarly placed to lead the way. Many of the countries of Europe have large immigrant populations that are partly the result of their own previous colonial ambitions, and partly the result of their perceived economic necessities, and partly the result of their own birthrate declines. The same is true of both the United States and Canada.

Of these countries Canada is in a peculiar position. It has a higher ratio of immigrants to native born of any country on earth. Some of its cities, like Vancouver and Toronto, have roughly half of the population born elsewhere in the world. Many schools in Canada have children from over 50 countries, some from over 100. So in asking my initial question, namely – What kind of an education ought we be offering to mankind for the 21st century? – a pretty good approximation would be to ask – What kind of education ought we to be offering in Canadian schools at the present time?

It seems to me that the conditions of global interdependence and the necessity for the international control of destructive war offer us some helpful hints. Let me just suggest a few of these as organizing principles:

- 1) A world of global interdependence requires the possibility of global inter-communication.
- 2) A world of global interdependence requires that nationalisms, tribalisms, and religious hatreds disappear or are at any rate greatly diminished.
- 3) A world of global interdependence requires that not only our scientific knowledge be widespread, that is, the results of our long-standing interrogation of nature, but that also our understanding of ourselves as conscious, moral, religious, musical, artistic, and literary beings be increased and made widespread too.
- 4) A world of global interdependence means that we must govern ourselves in such a way as to diminish tensions, to increase toleration of minority views, and to give reasonable influence to majority views and opinions.
- 5) We must settle disputes, both internally and internationally, according to the rule of law.

If we take the first principle seriously, then we must educate for an understanding of those main languages that presently shape our global reality. So we must make as many of our citizens fluent in the main languages of our planet: English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese. Then we must encourage as many of our citizens as possible to maintain their heritage tongues and literary and artistic cultures.

The second principle of global interdependence requiring the diminishment of nationalisms, tribalisms, and religious hatreds would require that we educate for tolerance of one other tribal, national, linguistic, or religious origins or preferences. Although it is not a tribalism, a preference for particular sexual preferences or marriage customs is probably best classified under this principle too. And here we should educate for tolerance and understanding. On the other hand, where individual rights are trampled upon by any particular tribalism, nationalism, religious practice, preference or tradition, we should guard against preferring the group practice to the individual right.

The third principle of global interdependence is the requirement of equal access globally to scientific and human knowledge. Within a country like Canada it means that all children should be acquainted with the primary methods and results of scientific research and its preconditions. It also means that we cannot neglect global history, global literature, global art, and global culture while educating our citizens for those things which are peculiarly Canadian. Our universities cannot become science research institutes, but each must continue to be *studium generale*. We cannot guard our planet's future nor the future of our species, both on and off this planet, if our citizens are ignorant of what will enable them to manage their planet or future planets better.

The fourth principle of global interdependence, the principle for fair and equitable global governance implies that our education should be an education for democratic processes and practices. There should be ample opportunity in everything that we do in our schools, and where possible in our homes, so that everybody gets to say what they wish to and everybody gets to take part in the major decisions that affect their lives. In this regard A.S. Neill and his *Summerhill* school and Bertrand Russell's *Beacon Hill* school are perhaps forerunners of the schools we must devise in the 21st century.

The fifth and final principle for global interdependence is the principle of the rule of law. This implies that our practices in our educational systems ought to model the best that our legal systems offer with respect to fairness and equality of treatment for students. For until

one trusts the fairness and equality of practices of treatment in everyday things, one cannot have trust in a formal legal structure.

In this editorial I have only sketched the problems and tasks that face us. In future editorials I shall develop each of these systematically. But perhaps enough has been outlined to suggest that the educational task for the 21st century is great and very different from the challenges of all the previous centuries of our existence.

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