

Challenges in International Education*

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RECENTLY I visited for nine months the new and emerging nations of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. It is difficult to realize that twenty-five of these nations have won their independence since World War II, with nearly 700 million persons involved—or one person in every four in the world.

Sometimes these nations are classified as underdeveloped countries, but anyone who knows them well realizes that a qualifying statement is needed in describing them. Actually they are more highly developed in some respects than the United States, but they are industrially (or economically) underdeveloped.

This trip was an exciting, distressing, and humbling experience. Exciting because of the people I met, the many fascinating sights I saw, and the bursts of energy and creativity which I witnessed. Distressing because of the many complex problems one encounters and the precarious nature of international affairs which impresses one everywhere he travels. Humbling because of the enormous jobs which face anyone who wants to be helpful abroad and because of the staggering tasks which confront anyone at home who is interested in promoting effective education for living in the international community of our day.

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I returned from my travels proud of many aspects of our national life, from the American drug store to the American school system. Yet I am more than ever aware that we too are an underdeveloped nation in some respects. We are underdeveloped in our knowledge of other lands and peoples, in our inability to communicate with the peoples of the world in their languages, in our adolescent desire to be liked by everyone and at all times, in our ability to interpret our beliefs and our way of life simply, boldly, and dramatically around the globe, and in our lack of realization that if we want others to be like us, we must be ready and willing to be like them at least in some respects. A realization of these facts made my journey a humbling experience.

These months of traveling abroad also strengthened my awareness of the many challenges which face American educators as we try to prepare ourselves and our pupils to live in the changing, confusing, chaotic world of our day and probably for decades to come. I shall touch briefly on ten of these challenges.

1. *To regain and restate the basic philosophy of American education*

Throughout the world today there is a passion for education. It is much in evidence everywhere—in the building of schools, in the proportion of national budgets allocated to education, and in the

thousands of adult education classes. This world-wide interest in education is a thrilling aspect of our times, yet the type of education being offered in many of the schools around the world is like that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and by no means adequate for the twentieth century.

Many leaders of education are looking to the United States for guidance in thinking about the aims of education in their lands. They have been attracted to education here because it is for all the children of all the people, because it is practical (being based on the needs of children *and* society), and because it is experimental in nature.

At least that was true in the past. Yet, at the most critical period in the history of education around the world, when we could help so many nations to establish educational systems which would be of tremendous value to them, we American educators are in retreat. We are unsure of ourselves, uncertain as to the wisdom of our educational philosophy, and terrified by the attacks on us and our ideas by individuals and pressure groups.

In one of those sudden swings of the pendulum which intermittently plague us as a nation, we are beginning to wonder if the Russians have the best approach to education. And in our eagerness for easy, quick answers to our dilemma, we have begun to think that science and mathematics will save us.

We surely need these two subjects, but if the world needs any one thing more than another it is the application of the findings of the social sciences to human and international relations. Our zeal to bridge the gaps in our curricula should not cause us to forget the importance of the social sciences, along with science, mathematics, and languages.

Yes, we need to clarify the goals of American education and to articulate our findings abroad simply, boldly, and dramatically. We should be proud of the basic philosophy of American education and realize that much of the philosophy which was developed here when we were a relatively new nation, struggling to achieve national unity, is exportable to other new nations today, even though the structure and methods of American education probably should not be copied elsewhere.

2. To develop a world-centered education

For a long while education in the United States has been Europe-centered. We have studied European history, literature and languages, and sometimes art and music—when they were not considered “frills” by local school boards. In the past such an education was understandable. Our heritage was primarily European. Our economic ties were largely with Europe, the political center of the world.

But today we live in a vastly bigger world, including Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The political center is moving from Europe; the world rather than just Europe is our home today.

To be intelligent citizens and effective human beings we need to learn as much as we can about the many areas of our contemporary international community. Only then will we gain understanding and appreciation of other groups of human beings around the globe. Drastic changes must be made in our curricula—in literature, languages, the social studies, art and music, and other fields—before we can acquire this learning.

To develop such a world-centered education will also demand some frame of

reference for our study of the international community. This background will not be developed quickly, but I would like to suggest a few points which might be included in it. If we are to live in the world today and tomorrow we need to realize, for example, that most of the world's people live in Asia, are non-white, are farmers and fishermen, live in villages, are non-Christians, are abysmally poor and therefore ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clothed, illiterate, and ill. Most of the world's people also live under forms of government and economy which are different from ours, and most of their governments are working together in the United Nations and its agencies.

These are fundamental facts which we need to know. If we really knew them and acted upon them, American education and American international relations would be altered radically—and for the better.

3. *To develop a philosophy of teaching about the world*

I have already said that one strength of American education at its best is that it is practical. Yet, like every other quality, this can be two-edged. The danger of the practical approach is that people tend to find some simple gadget, interesting activity, or pet project and to rely upon it without serious thought as to its real purpose.

We invite a student from abroad to speak in an Assembly, we sing a few songs from other parts of the world, or we build igloos, adobe houses, and wind-mills and think that we have promoted international understanding. Maybe we have; maybe we haven't.

It is high time that we gave serious thought to the philosophy of education for international understanding. We

need, for example, to wrestle with such questions as these:

Should we develop a single standard by which to study all countries, or should we use one standard for our friends in the NATO nations and another for Russia and China and whatever other nations are considered "enemies" at the moment?

How early should we begin to expose children to the problems of the world and in what ways? Should we reserve the exposé of political alliances and intrigues, religious and racial hatreds, and abysmal and shocking poverty for secondary school pupils or include them at the elementary school level?

What is the difference between education and propaganda in education for international understanding?

To what extent is interest in world affairs an escape from the baffling problems of our local communities and our nation? How can we integrate the study of local and national problems with world problems?

To what extent must our educational work abroad be dictated by official foreign policy? To put it more bluntly, must educational work abroad be a subtle form of imperialism?

Too little attention has been given to such questions, for answering them is much more difficult than working on methods and resources for international understanding. Yet these are basic questions which should be examined, and at least tentative solutions regarding them should be drawn soon.

4. *To develop a continuous, cumulative curriculum about the world*

In recent times three concepts of the role of American schools have been stressed: the child-centered school, the community-centered school, and the American society-centered school. Each of these has contributed to the development of our curriculum, but to them we

now need to add a fourth—the concept of the world-centered school.

Today's events challenge us to develop a curriculum from nursery school through adult education which will help each American to live in the international community which is painfully and slowly emerging.

To develop such a curriculum we may need to think in terms of broad themes which ought to permeate every subject field and every activity under the guidance of schools. Because of my own interest in such themes, I mention ten which might be considered in a continuous, cumulative curriculum. They are:

The Earth as the Home of Man
Two and a Half Billion Neighbors
Ways of Living Around the World
A World of Fun and Beauty
An Interdependent World
Many Countries and Cultures
Poverty and Plenty
Many Forms of Government
Many Religions
Conflict and Cooperation.¹

These are merely one man's suggestions regarding what might be considered in building a curriculum about the world. We need many others from individuals and groups. Furthermore, we need to encourage the thinking of many subject-matter groups, especially at the secondary school level, about how their fields can contribute to school-wide studies of the world.²

¹ Leonard S. Kenworthy, *Introducing Children to the World: In Elementary and Junior High Schools* (New York, Harper, 1956), 268 pp.

² The most recent and most ambitious undertaking of this kind was a special issue of the *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals* (December, 1956) on "International Understanding Through the Secondary School Curriculum." This was prepared by the Commission on International Understanding of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

5. *To examine critically the methods for promoting education for life in the international community*

We certainly know enough about the learning process today to realize that no one approach will be effective in arousing the interest of all boys and girls in the world. We know that a variety of approaches is needed to arouse interest on the part of different individuals, and that several methods can reinforce learning. We also know that other lands must be viewed from many angles—through their music and art, their history and contemporary affairs, their architecture and literature, and in other ways.

The methods we can use are far more numerous and richer than we sometimes realize. There are thousands of resource persons upon whom we can draw. There are scores of valuable reference books, countless hobby interests to utilize. There are hundreds of films and filmstrips, charts, maps, globes, radio and television programs, and other audiovisual resources which can be helpful.

We need now to concentrate on discovering which of these methods seem to be most effective with certain age groups, with certain aims in view, and with certain types of children.

Without any statistical evidence to support his contention, the writer would like to suggest that the most promising practice today in international education is school affiliations.³ These are group friendships, fostered over a period of years by a wide variety of methods and involving teachers and parents as well as children. I look forward to the day when every pupil in American schools will be

³ For further information write to the School Affiliation Service, American Friends Service Committee, 20 South 12th Street, Philadelphia 7, Pa.

involved in at least four such affiliations during his academic years, each affiliation being in a different part of the world.

6. *To develop patterns for studying countries and cultures*

Because the job of introducing ourselves and our pupils to the world is so vast and complex, we need to develop useful patterns for studying countries and cultures. Development of these patterns is even more important when one realizes how many new nations will join the international community in the next few years, long after tomorrow's citizens have had a chance to study about them in schools. Perhaps development of the skill of looking at a locality is more important as an aim of a school than the acquisition of knowledge about places, since the knowledge will change and new groups of human beings will be formed in the future.

There are dangers in suggesting such patterns, for they can be misinterpreted and become static rather than dynamic. Nevertheless, most teachers need some help in how to study a country and its culture. Therefore this writer will risk suggesting such a pattern.

As we study any community, any country, or any culture, we need to keep a few factors in mind. In most instances it is best to begin with the geographic base—the location, lay of the land, climate, and resources.

Then we need to look at the people of a given area and their ways of living.

Next comes an understanding of their values, goals, and ideals. This is difficult, but it is central to an understanding of any community, any country, or any culture.

Growing out of these values are the institutions of a people. There are at

least five factors in almost every group—the family, religion, government, education, and the economy of the people. More and more the mass media too need to be examined.

Finally, we need to look at the creative expressions of any group of people. Their future is likely to depend upon these creative talents, ranging from the arts to social organization.

All of these aspects of life need to be examined in regard to the past, present, and future of a group, as well as its relationships with other communities, countries, and cultures.

7. *To develop adequate resources for studies of the world*

If we are to do an effective job of teaching about the world, we must increase and improve the resources for such studies. A wealth of material is now available, but there are glaring omissions in our printed publications and audio-visual materials. For example, thirteen and a half years after the establishment of the United Nations there is still no adequate treatment of it for elementary school children. Neither is there any simple account of village life in various parts of the world, despite the fact that most of the world live in villages.

There are whole areas of the world about which there is little material or very little adequate material. This is especially true of Africa and Southeast Asia. Then there are areas of the world about which our information is out of date. This criticism applies primarily to Latin America. A great deal was printed and filmed in the days of the Good Neighbor Policy, but precious little has been produced since that time.

A crying need in this whole field of international education is a curriculum center on world affairs for teachers. It

should be run by a teachers college, university, or private organization rather than by an agency of the government, and should be assisted by well-qualified, creative teachers, and by writers, publishers, and competent organizations in the preparation of a wealth and variety of accurate, objective, and yet interesting materials.

8. *To develop effective means of evaluating growth in international understanding*

Evaluation is always a difficult process, especially in the realms of attitudes and actions in the field of international education. It is probably the weakest link in the chain of challenges in this discussion. We must clarify our aims before we can make much progress in evaluation, but in the meantime experimentation in this broad field should be encouraged. Tests of information are available, but they quickly become obsolete. Up-to-date ones are relatively easy to devise, however.

International understanding is basically the development of attitudes, skills, and broad concepts leading to enlightened behavior. These aspects of life are difficult to measure, hence precious little has been done in this important yet complicated field.

Here and there individuals and systems are experimenting. An example is the series of tests on Asia given in conjunction with the state-wide television series in Connecticut.

Evaluation in international education is a wide-open field for classroom teachers, school systems, and doctoral candidates.⁴

⁴ See Margaret Cormack, "How Can Teachers Evaluate Growth in International Understanding?" *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals*, December, 1956.

9. *To educate teachers with world horizons*

In international education as in every other type, the teacher is the keystone of the arch. Such education must, therefore, begin with the training of world-minded teachers. What we need is not ideal internationalists, but people who are growing, people who are stretching their horizons, people who are becoming

integrated individuals
experts in democratic human relations
rooted in their own country and culture
appreciative of other countries and cultures
informed about the contemporary world scene
informed participants in efforts to strengthen the United Nations and achieve world community
conversant with methods and materials for creating world-minded children and youth
undergirded by a faith or philosophy of life which makes all this possible.⁵

If we can develop enough such persons, future historians may be able to write that the teachers of the United States did their part in helping to turn the world from international suicide to international sanity, from world chaos to world community.

There are scores of ways in which each of us can grow in the direction of world-mindedness, but space here permits mention of only three.

1. As a start, read at least one good book about world affairs.⁶

⁵ Leonard S. Kenworthy, *World Horizons for Teachers* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952).

⁶ Four books in this field which I recommend highly are; Chester Bowles, *Ideas, People and Peace* (Harper, 1958); Norman Cousins, *Who Speaks for Man?* (Macmillan, 1953); Vera Dean, *The Nature of the Non-Western World* (Mentor, 1957); and Louis Fischer, *This Is Our World* (Harper, 1956).

2. Subscribe to a magazine which will help you to keep abreast of current world affairs, such as *Focus*, the Foreign Policy *Headline Books*, and *UNESCO Courier*.

3. Affiliate with some organization which is trying to improve world understanding, whether it be the American Association for the United Nations, the Foreign Policy Association, or some kindred group.

10. *To win public support for programs in our schools about the world*

Many teachers are already carrying on programs about the world in their classes. Still more would do so if they felt easy and secure in handling controversial issues in a realistic and relatively objective way.

There are plenty of people and a few blatantly vocal organizations ready to pounce upon teachers and school systems if they go very far in implementing the suggestions set forth in this discussion. We should encourage individuals and organizations in our communities to demand more and better teaching about the world. Too often such persons and groups wait until there is trouble to come to the rescue of world-minded teachers. They need to shift from a negative, defensive approach to a more positive one. The public will support them in most cases, as has been shown in the election of pro-UNESCO members to the Los Angeles School board recently after years of anti-UNESCO and anti-UN propaganda in that city.

A little more than a hundred years ago the American people caught a vision of a public school system to prepare people for life in a democratic society. The is-

sues involved were argued in a debate lasting for years, but a decision was finally made and a system of free, compulsory education was instituted of which we can be very proud, despite its weaknesses.

Perhaps we are on the threshold of another such vision and another such debate over the importance of preparing young people to live in the international community of our day. In this debate it is important to bear in mind and convince other people that education for international understanding and education for national loyalty are complementary rather than contradictory terms; that education about the world is not intended to supplant but to supplement education about the United States.

Our self-interest demands such an education even if our idealism is not strong enough to convince us that it is necessary.

CONCLUSION

In American schools today too many children are getting a nineteenth century education for a twentieth century world. It is time that our schools developed programs which will prepare pupils to live effectively during the next fifty years. It is time that we gave our pupils a cockpit view of the world as well as a porthole view of their surrounding communities. It is time that we teachers took off our cultural blinders and gained a planetary perspective.

Yes, it is a great as well as a ghastly time to be a teacher. Ghastly because of the possibilities of mankind's suicide; great because of what we can do to promote man's survival and the development of new kinds of human beings able to live in a world community.