

## **The Interrelationship of Civic Ed and Global Issues**

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Global issues is a topic that has received varying degrees of emphasis in social studies education over the years. The last heyday was during the 1980's and though its importance has declined since then it is enjoying something of a comeback, especially in light of the recent terrorist attacks and the advance of economic globalization.

### **Defining Global Issues**

One of the major obstacles faced by teachers in examining global issues was resistance by schools and communities to the perception that global issues were promoting liberal, even communist ideals and that it sought to emphasize that students should be citizens of the world first and citizens of their country second. Alternatively, global issues were often seen as someone else's problem and therefore not directly relevant to students' lives. These criticisms are not wholly without merit but they draw on too narrow a definition of the content of global issues. Rather, we should choose a more expansive definition of global issues which will enable us to address our critics and help avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water.

A global issue may be defined as a problem which affects people in widely varied locations in similar but locally distinct ways and which demands a political response. Let us apply this definition to concepts terrorism and hate crime. The former is now broadly seen as a global issue but is seldomly taught that way. The later is seen primarily as a national, state or local problem but is not often considered a global issue.

Most people will admit that terrorism not only affects one nation but as in the case of Al Queda can affect the citizens of many nations at the same time. The effects of terrorist acts on individuals are similar; fear, anger, resentment, hopelessness but they manifest themselves very differently in Jerusalem, Belfast, Bilbao and New York. Because terrorism is political in nature it demands that governments make policies to address it in order to protect their citizens and their sovereignty. However, in the U.S., the question has become what should this country do about terrorism; rather than what can any country do about terrorism?

Hate crime on the other hand appears more often than not to be the product of extremists responding to local conditions. The target of the hate crime may be selected on the basis of her ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or any of many other categories. However, despite the differences in the way the problem presents itself, the underlying issue - hate - is present in many, if not most nations on the earth. Crimes of all kind call for some response by government, in Germany, certain hate groups have been banned, in the United States, some states have chosen to adopt hate crimes laws - but not all states. The discussion around the benefits of different policies may in fact be the only response to hate crime but it is still a political response. Students can benefit greatly by examining how people in other places have successfully and unsuccessfully addressed issues of crime motivated by hate.

In the past global education often focused on international responses to problems. In general, this meant that students studied or worked in conjunction with

NGO's or IGO's to produce change, often without regard or even in opposition to their national governments. This is one valid approach but it excludes the vital and central message of civic education - that citizens working together can effect change in their society through the wise and informed use of governments. Further, the emphasis on relying on NGO's to solve problems, reduces students' sense of external efficacy - in effect, the message becomes that global issues are too big to be addressed meaningfully by one class or one student. The recent ads by the Office of Drug Control Policy that link the purchase of illegal drugs by students with funding for terrorists would seem to underline the argument that no problem is too big for students. The old phrase "think globally - act locally" has never been more true.

### **Global Issues Content**

If we can accept the broader definition of global issues, then the question becomes judicious selection of good global issues. The same basic concerns that shape selection of other LRE content should guide the teacher's selection with one exception - the issues at hand must affect many people in different places. Not every issue is global, nor are all global issues good for teaching in classrooms in the United States.

While Turkey is facing a decision about whether to abolish the death penalty in order to obtain EU membership, the United States is not faced with a similar choice. Capital punishment is a global issue but may not be the best choice for U.S. educators because the debate here is primarily focused on the fair application of the death penalty not its existence. More central to the debate in Turkey and in the U.S. is national sovereignty and how much to give away for freer trade. This issue could be addressed in U.S. classrooms by examining our involvement before the World Trade Court concerning steel tariffs. That discussion could occur in a history class when discussing protectionism or in an economics class about world trade or in a geography class when discussing the distribution of resources.

Some other issues that involve international agreements may seem to be rich ground for global issues - the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court for example - but they are not. The main reason is that they do not involve people all over the world or to the extent that they do, the main question is not about the benefits of the policy but rather why the U.S. won't participate. A discussion of the underlying issues may be highly relevant but should be U.S. based otherwise, the tendency will be toward polarization and an overly simplistic view that supports or opposes U.S. policy.

Some issues which may be too controversial or painful for students in certain communities can be examined from the psychologically safe distance of a global context. We may feel uncomfortable looking at police excesses in our own community but we might not mind looking at the police in Mexico or Brazil. We may not want to examine the recent restrictions on civil liberties in the U.S. out of fear of appearing divided but we may not mind examining Russian actions in Chechnya.

Global issues content supports a deeper understanding of relevant controversial issues. It also helps students better understand the political processes that shape policy which will improve their feelings of internal efficacy. It provides connections between the work in the classroom and the larger world beyond the classroom. Additionally, it creates opportunities for advocacy by students individually or as a class.

## **Global Issues Pedagogy**

Good LRE teaching methods are the same whether you are dealing with content that is nationally or globally oriented. In essence, we are seeking to reduce the disconnect between teaching about democracy and teaching for democracy. In doing so, we use active learning strategies that allow students to develop the habits of mind of good citizens. During a global issues lesson, students should have the opportunity to gather and process information from multiple sources and perspectives. They should synthesize and then analyze this information. Their analysis should lead them to form a reasoned and defensible judgment about the issue which can then be shared with their peers and/or the teacher. Students can also be encouraged to work collaboratively to identify and advocate for particular actions by government and individuals. The methods teachers use with great success in their classrooms now need not change, only the content of the lesson. Good teaching is still good teaching.

As the world has become more interconnected, the problems societies face have also gone global. Crime, AIDS, refugees, corruption, and gender inequity however are not problems that belong only to the world as a whole at once. They also belong to each nation and community. Global issues allow teachers and students to draw on more resources when seeking to work toward a solution. Having a deeper understanding of a problem makes one a better citizen of his own nation and yes, of the world.