Global Education Is An Answer

by Dr. Rose Lee Hayden

A basic set of assumptions underpin all of my observations about global education. First, Americans need to know more about the rest of the world or else we will be increasingly at its mercy. Secondly, we must be aware that what we do deeply affects the rest of the world since it will come back to haunt us in a global community we cannot escape and in which we are firmly enmeshed. Finally, citizens need to be knowledgeable about the world to oversee their own government's behavior within it. Sister city exchanges are vitally important links in the chain of international relationships. No longer can foreign policy be considered a matter solely for diplomats, trade experts and other specialists. Indeed, it never should have been.

Here is an example of a parochialism related to the world of business and high finance: General Motors was puzzled by the lack of enthusiasm the introduction of its Chevrolet Nova automobile aroused among its Puerto Rican dealers. The reason, it turned out, was simple: Nova means "star," but when spoken in Spanish it sounds like "no va" which means "it doesn't go." The company quickly changed the car's name to "Caribe" and it sold nicely.

How else but through international education exchanges do we draw out our common humanity? Certainly, in this not-the-best-of-all-possible worlds, a non-earthling would marvel at man's preference for tribal and smalltown allegiances in the face of global interdependencies and the proliferation of nuclear powers. Brute fact has yet to modify the last century's doctrine of absolute national sovereignty, with its veneration of the omnipotent and isolated nation-state.

New nations emerge, almost daily it seems, each a convert to a crumbling faith. More established and wealthier states suddenly and painfully learn that traditional international strategies are no longer operative; that Palestinian guerillas destroy European airports; that military satellites violate national borders with impunity; that Kuwait is closer to the neighborhood gas station than the schoolyard; that acupuncture cures the ailing; that the price of beef in the United States reflects population pressures of a drought-stricken world; that distant wars impoverish and polarize; and that there is no escape from an anxious and fretful world out there, and a disgruntled citizenry right here.

Here, then, are five obvious reasons for nuturing a capacity to learn about and experience other cultures. The first reason we Americans must globalize education is elemental—survival. We must sustain informed connections in order to survive in a competitive and nuclear global system—if not to prosper and maintain our way of life.

A second reason is humanitarian. If the "haves" of this world do not care and share, we will have little claim to self-decency in a desperate and starving world.

Without Malthusian checks, a century hence, in Heilbroner's not-so-cheery future, there will be 40 billion people in developing nations and 1.7 billion or so in the developed countries of this hungry planet. If we are riders on the earth together, it is clear that not everyone will get a seat on this overcrowded spaceship. Experts already predict 150 million famine deaths a year in the 1980s. It would be as if three of every four Americans today would perish before New Year's Eve. Small wonder that in the so-called "post-war" period, there have been 40 major conflicts to date.

To hold in one's hand the living or dying of half a million children, to be the only power capable of beginning the building of grain reserves, to be the chief state with power and wealth enough to rise above the narrow temptations of naked market power—here is a challenge unequaled in history. And if it is not met, it is with foreboding that America's friends will recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, founding father and tutelary genius of the new republic, "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just."

The third reason for attempting, through education, to relate to all peoples and cultures is an inherently selfish as opposed to altruistic one—the need for shared brain-power. Historically, this nation is the product of brains imported from abroad, of persons escaping from tyrannies, pogroms and famines. We need the best-of-all-possible minds if we hope to have the best-of-all-possible worlds. Only the best minds working cooperatively can help mitigate the seemingly intractable problems of mankind which have been discussed in brief, and have worsened even in this short span of time: energy, population, pollution, urban sprawl, disease, discrimination and injustice, hunger, war and political repression. The list is long. As Paul Valery remarked, "The trouble with our times is that the future just is not what it used to be."

Even if security, compassion and human survival were not at issue, other-culture learning would be prescribed as the insulin to counteract what one observer termed "the excess sugar of a diabetic culture." While Americans are physically overfed and overweight, we are aesthetically starved. Thrills and violence, not beauty and reflection, abound, making us all fretful and anxious.

The principals of Bearden Junior High School, Knoxville, Tennessee and Wu Fu Junior High, Kaohsiung, Taiwan sign school affiliation agreement as students from both schools observe.

One way to avert a national nervous breakdown is to educate children to be aware of the dazzling diversity of cultural expression around the world and within our own national borders. Full appreciation of such facets of human existence as music, drama, dance, costume, sports, cooking, gardening, religious rites and literature is unattainable without an education which opens the mind and cultivates taste. It is essential in a post-industrial society to assure mental health. Drawing from Stephen Bail's "The Purposes of Education," however brief the candle of life may seem when viewed by the eye of eternity, a life span of 75 to 80 years involves a massive 650,000 to 700,000 hours of being, which is a lot of existence but not necessarily a lot of being. Even if sleep is deducted, something close to one-half million waking hours will be experienced. Of these, fewer than 90,000 hours—less than one-fifth of the total will be spent on the job. That is a lot of reruns on television.

Finally, as previously mentioned, no democratic leadership, however motivated to build a peaceful world order, can long risk outrunning the capacity of its people to interpret and respond intelligently to global challenges and opportunities. The dangers of wide-spread apathy, of neo-isolationism in a nuclear age are obvious. Thus, the internationalizing mission of the schools is clearly tied to the national need for a citizenry sufficiently sophisticated to be able to cope with interdependence.

In sum, this nation requires: a cadre of experts about other peoples and cultures, professionals in business and government capable of successfully transacting transnational negotiations, scientists and technicians able to share and extend the frontiers of human knowledge on a global basis, and citizens knowledgeable enough to support tough leadership decisions and capable of responsible participation in a democratic society.

Like it or not, the interdependent facts of life are all too real. Let me share a few, only to illustrate more graphically the interconnected destiny of our species:

- The United States is the fourth-largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. One out of three new Americans is an immigrant today, and this figure discounts the 8-10 million illegal aliens presently residing within our borders.

Dr. Rose Lee Hayden is presently the executive director of the National Council on Foreign Language and International studies in New York. She has an extensive background in international education and was a former deputy director of the Peace Corps, then specialized in international educational exchange projects at the U.S. International Communication Agency. This article is based on a speech she delivered before the 22nd annual Sister Cities Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 1979.

- There are over 150 sovereign nations in the world. It is a polycentric world, where no one is in charge. These nations invest over $400 billion a year in armaments. By the 1980s, there may be close to 400 installed nuclear reactors in 28 countries. Since 1954 one country per year has gone nuclear on the average. Home-made nukes are a terrifying but possible reality.
- One in six Americans owes his or her employment directly to international trade. U.S. agricultural exports have totaled over $20 billion for five consecutive years. The total value of U.S. imports and exports has topped the $100 billion mark.
- Direct foreign investment in the U.S. increased 50 percent in the period 1973-1976. It now totals well over $50 million. Volkswagen's $100 million plant in New Stanton, Pennsylvania now employs over 5,000 people. The Bantam book you read, the Keebler chocolate chip cookie you nibble, even the Alka Seltzer tablet you consume are the products of foreign-owned companies. One-fourth of each new dollar of U.S. investment now goes abroad. Foreign banks in the United States have assets exceeding $250 billion.

Overall, the response of the American educational system and other systems to the challenge of preparing citizens for effective coping in an interconnected world is woefully inadequate. Unless some major adjustments are made to compensate for these anachronisms, the United States may well lack the basic human resources to steer its ship of state through the uncharted interdependent currents of its next one hundred years. Consider these facts:

- Less than 1 percent of the college-aged group in the United States is enrolled in any course which specifically features international issues or areas.
- Only about 1 percent of college and university faculty members go abroad each year. Of this number, a mere 0.01 percent are sponsored under the auspices of the Fulbright-Hays exchange program, whose funding has eroded by fully 30 percent in