

## **SOCIAL STUDIES AND GLOBALIZATION – A TEACHER’S CONCERN**

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One of the unintended consequences of *No Child Left Behind Act 2001* (NCLB) is the reduction in social studies instruction especially at the elementary school level.<sup>1</sup> This is ironic because *No Child Left Behind* touts the need for civics education which is one of the social studies strands. More ironic, in 2009, we are in the globalization era, yet many schools in the United States (US) are not educating their students about globalism and world history. Less instruction at a time when world citizenry is needed can be partially resolved if teachers of all disciplines infuse globalism in their course curriculum.

It is critical for American students to fully understand not only their country’s history but the place of the United State’s in a greater society. Students need to look at politics and economics with a broader lens and examine multiple perspectives.

For the secondary school teacher and even for the college history professor, globalizing American history curriculum is easier than one might perceive. Adding an international perspective will encourage greater awareness of other societies. One way to convey to teachers and students why this globalism is important might be through the viewing of Karl Fisch’s *Did You Know Shift Happens* (available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K04o2ic4g-A>).<sup>2</sup> This short video presents statistics and compares a variety of countries. It has fascinating projections about future elements of a number of countries as technology and the information continue to produce change. These creatively presented statistics will capture student attention in a less formal style than reading the *CIA World Factbook* or *the Economist*.

Another way to engage students in the concept of globalism and why it is import knowing about other countries, is to have students read Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat*.<sup>3</sup> Ask them to follow the creation of Friedman’s laptop from its purchase to its delivery and to count the number of countries involved. They will be amazed when they discover that there are over 400 businesses and suppliers involved.

Either of these activities introduces globalism and is an ideal foundation for follow up lessons in history, geography, government, economics, business, math and technology. Globalism is more than statistics and business transactions. In 2006, at the Northeast Regional Conference on Social Studies (NERC), a group of scholars presented an all day workshop “‘Big Mac’ Attacks: Using McDonald’s to teach Globalization”.<sup>4</sup> Their presentations used the familiar US business to demonstrate the socio-political-economic connection between the US and many countries. Religious and other global cultural identities were examined in the context of this popular business.

The public high school class won’t have the depth as the NERC workshop but the young students will be able to examine any number of US big businesses and their place in a global society. Younger students might research the origin of the raw materials in chewing gum where the materials are grown or produced and then their route to final product. Another but more direct opportunity is available when US History and Government students study the Preamble to the US Constitution. Have them examine the preamble from two or three other countries not of English origin. Are there universal principles and themes among them?

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century image of the US in foreign relations was as “ugly American”. This negative image is still present. Breaking out of the insular mode is a must for better co-existence in a shrunken world. In expanding the current content teachers need to be careful that they avoid stereotyping other cultures, as well as US American society, which is limiting, nor should they create artificial connections when the link is not there. Globalization of a course curriculum should not create US bashing but rather make students more attuned to the contemporary world while increasing better human understanding. The lesson ideas are limitless and there are many sources for them. Whatever the content, adding the greater global perspective will strengthen student awareness and better prepare them for the fast moving technological age of global citizenry.

### Comment

Dr. Ackerman and Nashua Community College Professor Robyn Griswold have presented a numerous regional and state workshops for teaching on ways to globalize their course curriculums.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Social Studies is the umbrella name for the content curriculums of History, Economics, Civics, Government, and Geography.
- <sup>2</sup> There are multiple versions. The author prefers the original created in late 2006/early 2007 although other versions were produced in 2007 – 2009. Students might enjoy comparing the statistics between the original version of 2006 and the newest of 2009 and how interrelationship between nations has and is changing.
- <sup>3</sup> Friedman, Thomas. *The World Is Flat*. (2006). NY: Farrar, Straus, and Girous. 18 – 23.
- <sup>4</sup> Sessions were by Richard Read, Barbara Petzen, James Diskant, Brooks Goddard, Leslie Swartz, Gail Wang, Ryan Bradeen, Bob Mitchell, Kathleen Woods Masalski, and James L. Watson. March 2006.

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