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Educating for Global Citizenship

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Global Citizenry

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Abstract

The NOHS conference theme, “The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts” directly pointed to the concept of global citizens and that human services not only operate with every individual helping interaction, with organizations coordinating services, and local citizens contributing labor and money but also within the community of all nations and cultures. The diverse elements of local communities must be defined within the perspective of global issues and concerns. Collaboration begins on the interpersonal level, expands to the community level, and connects to the national level. The national sphere is identified by its position and relationship to the rest of the world and is conceptualized fully by its membership in the international community. The discussion of global issues coalesces in linkages to how people and cultures have solved their community problems and how these solutions can apply to an envisioning a more adaptive, caring world. Essentially, the smallest community is the planet.

Dia Dhuit

“It’s trying times...it’s the tryingest of times.” Conversations with my neighbor, Gracie, a woman, 70+ years of age, living alone in a remote mountain cabin on her land that’s been in the family since ownership became a necessary process, often begin with this tautology. “Things are tough all over but we sure are lucky to be living on this mountain in God’s country” she’ll usually add. I would have to agree with the fortunate circumstances of living in the high country – the beauty, climate, and wildlife as well as resilient, caring mountain folks.

In the Southern Appalachians, an area ordinarily considered to be redolent with poverty and social challenge, a case can be easily made that “things” are better than they have been, at least according to modern standards. Not considering the centuries of native adaptation or the recent economic travail, there is far less poverty and lack of opportunity in this region than once was. Contrary to common opinion, life is generally much better now in “them thar hills”. Wealth, income, and general economic development have progressed significantly. People are living longer, staying at hospitals less, and keeping children healthier (ARC, 2010). More are attending college; ability to pay is no longer an issue. One has to ride deep into the hollers to find serious conditions. These days you’ll pass a lot of gated communities on the way.

The same can be said for other places around the world. According to the United Nations, poverty rates have fallen from 46% to 27% since 1990. The global poverty rate is still expected to decline and reach 15% by 2015 even though the recent economic crisis has affected financial conditions around the world. Some regions, especially sub-Saharan Africa, may see increases in poverty while others, namely East Asia, will have marked decreases. While China’s increase in gross domestic product has recently declined, the growth is still phenomenal. Japan has been outpaced by China and faces a huge budget deficit, far larger proportionally than the United States. They face an even greater challenge from environmental disruption. The US gets a 2.8% growth rate in GDP (US BEA, 2010) for the last quarter in 2010, a very comfortable percentage even though the economy has dramatically mixed performance.

Yes, times are trying but we are making progress. Global child mortality since 1990 has thankfully dropped by 35%, yet all too many children, 22 thousand, die every day and most from easily preventable diseases and related causes. Though rates are improving, over 500,000 women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, largely preventable. Fortunately, breastfeeding has increased along with vitamin A supplementation has by 50% in developing regions. Measles deaths have lowered by 75% since 2000. All this is despite that 80% live on less than \$10 dollars per day. Forty percent of the planet lives on 5% of global income while 20% thrive on 75%. Incomes are increasing but so is income inequality. One billion people cannot read or write, an improvement from past decades but still too many. Less than 1% of the money spent on weapons around the world could pay for every child on Earth to attend school. We have the resources; allocation and prioritization are the keys.

What about the United States as a whole? While the economic conditions may dispose some to crime, the rate has been lessening considerably and 2009 was less than any year since the late 1960s. According to the FBI, crime rates have been declining since the mid 90s. The US Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention states their overall rate is the smallest in decades. On the other hand, we lead the world in percentage of people incarcerated and this rate is increasing. Prisons have been a growth industry yet overbuilt in some states, burdening municipalities with unaffordable debt. A drug war runs right along our border. Ten percent of African-Americans are in prison and more likely to be arrested. Fortunately, executions are at historically low rates and more states are outlawing it.

Poverty is increasing due to economic circumstances and the middle class stagnating. Still, the United States is growing economically even though unemployment rates are dropping slowly. Sending jobs overseas results from buying stuff made there; exploiting cheap labor has hidden costs. Business and industry continue to make money globally, outsourcing instead of creating jobs activity in this country. We're making money but only for certain sectors that know how best to work the system. A more progressive and sustainable growth oriented tax policy would be beneficial rather than tax breaks for the rich and powerful. The money has not disappeared; it is being held rather than redistributed and spent elsewhere rather than being earned here.

Politicians are balancing governmental budgets on the backs of public employees yet the government is what saved us from economic collapse. The public sector rescued the economic system and then was blamed for the problem. The national treasury has been pilfered and the socioeconomic gains made as a society are at risk. A monetary system should be designed for healthy consumption and balanced public/private expenditure, not a get rich quick and winner take all struggle. That was the lesson of the Great Depression. We have to cut back on spending but you must spend money to make some. Unemployment has hit the hardest those with the fewest skills and less education, people likely to need human services due to job loss. Human Services, as a field, should advocate lifestyles that balance public and private interests, promoting both the individual and the commons – here and all over the world.

Immigration is a contentious issue, calling for legislative action and court rulings. Recent decades have seen higher rates and numbers in immigration than ever before, in an economy dependent on it. While Spanish is spoken in many homes, most children and youth speak English and there is no reason to suppose that America is more threatened by immigration today than at any time in its history. According to Bill Bryson (1998), less than 10% of Americans were born in another country, a percentage less than most other developed countries. The cities where immigration is greatest are the ones with more vital economies. Immigrants are overly

represented in organizations essential to business interests in the US. While overpopulation and international issues must affect decisions regarding immigration, this country is enhanced by people from around the world.

El Ejemplar

Since 2000, ETSU has operated a summer camp for the children of migrant and guest workers, who come to the farms of rural areas near the university to pick strawberries and tomatoes. Students receive course credit for working in the camps, providing activities and education to children otherwise spending most of their time unsupervised. The youngsters learn a lot and also teach the college students how to speak Spanish as well as the details of another culture. Their parents are glad to earn whatever they can in the long, hot days of summer, doing what most Americans apparently will not, even when the unemployment rate is constantly paraded across the television news. We should appreciate the willingness of farm workers to pick our crops because if they didn't we would either do so or starve.

It is the best of times and the worst of times. All over, we have so much more than ever, yet we face the potential travail of climate change, nuclear meltdown, and ecological disasters. Democracy is breaking out in places where we thought it could not while tyranny still lives and is surreptitiously growing within our own borders. The history and contributions of labor unions, which are largely responsible for advances in working conditions in this country, are ignored. One of the finest congressional representatives in this country, Gabriel Giffords, struggles to heal. President Obama has saved us from economic collapse but we don't seem to appreciate it. We've won a war this year, i.e., withdrawn from combat, but don't seem to notice it. We have accomplished so much, but don't seem to recognize it.

The US now has a national health care plan, joining most developed countries in making sure everyone has access to medical services, though still the single largest reason for personal bankruptcy. Deaths to cancer are down significantly, due to prevention, earlier diagnosis, and treatment. Nevertheless, carcinogens continue to proliferate along with species extinction and habitat destruction. Oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico, fires and drought in the Southwest, thousand-year flooding in Nashville and the Midwest, monster tornadoes in the South, along with tsunamis off India and Japan, earthquakes in Haiti and China...record snowfalls, glacial melting, vanishing fish, dying coal reefs, removing mountaintops...climate change is here and escalating, no matter who or what is causing it.

To balance this, people are eating more organic food, changing lightbulbs, buying at farmer's markets, growing gardens, canning veggies, and freezing local tomatoes, purchasing from coops and responsible, local companies. Community supported agriculture is expanding as more and more healthy grocery stores and green retail proliferate. Community health workers and health clinics in communities are expanding while patient advocates and child life specialists are hired, adding to the contributions of human services. Alternative power sources like wind and solar are accelerating. Germany has decided to build no more nuclear power plants and China is leading the way with green products. Habitats for humanity of the future will be highlighted as energy efficient.

Challenges and accomplishments are filled with steps forward and steps backward. Essential questions challenge the field. How do human services fit within the change and democratization of the Mediterranean countries? How do human services manifest within the dramatic economic growth in Asia? How do human services contribute during ecological and

climate crises in varying locations locally and around the globe? How do human services meet growing needs in an aging population? How do human services respond to crime, delinquency, and terrorism? How do human services deal with issues of immigration? Life is a process of growth. There are cycles within a range of adaptation. Human services are intimately connected to the environments where we live and the planet on which we must depend.

Li Zheng

Jiaju, a graduate student in counseling, came to college in America after his high school degree, accompanying his girlfriend, who is also a graduate student in counseling. Asked to talk about human services in China, his home country, the comments were illuminating. First of all, he stated, most formal counseling occurs within university settings, provided or coordinated by university faculty. Human services in China are primarily a family responsibility, not governmental. As a collectivistic value, candid honesty in counseling is a foreign concept. Confidentiality resides within the family. To share with a counselor is a breach of privacy. It is traditional in China to deny that mental health issues within one's family exist. Though changes are awakening, social security for elders is the responsibility of their children. Until fairly recently, the majority of Chinese had no phones, refrigerators, or toilet paper. Now we have to get most our stuff from them.

Intercultural competence is the process of constantly learning useful information about other cultures. The process is continual because cultures, especially today, go through changes steadily as well as discontinuously. Once key concepts about a cultural group become known, additional information quickly emerges as time evolves, people grow, and ecological and political circumstances transition. Even within most societies, the varieties of cultural experiences are practically innumerable and their differences circumstantially profound. Throughout the world, the sheer number of cultures and the degree of change make the goal of intercultural competence a perennial task, one where there is always more to learn.

Participants in the conference arrived from many parts of this country and some from beyond, a microcosm of global citizenry and an example of how we should convey responsible, caring action in our relationships with other peoples around the world. The challenge is to construct a perspective that keeps individual, family, and cultural practices while preparing a way for diverse cultures to live together, learn from one another, and celebrate our mutuality. The concept of community is encapsulated within the macrosystem; understanding each level is important in comprehending the whole. The NOHS Community Action Project was a prime example of how to interject conferees into human services actively within the setting of the conference.

This country, as the greatest economic, military, and social force on the planet, has integrated itself historically into almost every nation on earth. Americans truly are global citizens; the problem is recognizing this and living up to the responsibility of that influence. We are models for the rest of the world, and we gain our knowledge and expertise within the communities of our residence and impact. This country is the world's largest provider of human services on the planet. We have given and continue to give the most. But, we are challenged to understand the depth and capacity of our offerings, and others give a larger percentage of their resources. Learning about the needs and development of people worldwide helps us to participate more capably in the conversation of humankind and help bring about a planet that will survive and thrive into the future. The mission of human services is to help make a better world.

Kifano

Victor, a student at East Tennessee State University, emigrated from the Sudan and started the Lost Boys and Girls Student Organization at the university. He has often told his story, so sadly similar to the others heard about the tragedy in his country of origin. A survivor of genocide, he barely escaped with his life, running with a group of young people through the wildlands of southern Sudan. Lions attacked at night and soldiers ravaged by day. Food and water were scarce; death and disease followed closely as they ran for their lives. He was repelled when trying to enter refugee camps. His village was destroyed but he hopes to return one day. A student in the Human Services program at ETSU came from Liberia, where he survived civil war. The story of his life is punctuated by the absolute certainty he was going to be killed.

We have it all and have so far to go. Human services coincide with how we decide to live and survive on this planet. Surviving means to set up systems and conditions that are sustainable. We must develop food, energy, and shelter systems that will sustain us and not destroy or poison us. And, that can be done in a way that enhances and sustains our economy. To live means to thrive, to engage in personal, social, cultural, familial, societal, and international activities that enhance our existence. That is the enjoyment of life. We have to eat, stay warm (or cool) and dry, but beyond that is what makes it all worthwhile. Recognizing this and continuing with the work of making life better for all, each, and any one of us is now a global challenge. Human services must proceed from a global perspective. Think globally, serve locally. That is the essential mission of human services.

We grow based on our strengths, learning from our weaknesses. We lament the changes so desperately needed, yet we build upon the successes of the past. We can congratulate ourselves on the accomplishments that enable the average American to live better than centuries of royalty while knowing vast multitudes have less than our pets. To end metaphorically, one can only eat an elephant one bite at a time. Oceans are only drops of water that have joined together. As Gracie once needlepointed, "Fear not the future, for God is already there." We combat global problems by helping our self, our families, our friends, our colleagues, and our communities in the context of all of us living together here on Earth. The power of one equals the power within everyone. Tat Tvam Asi.

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