

Creating a Curriculum for a Global Future

Educators need to work together to prepare our young to deal with worldwide problems and to show them they *can* make a difference.

MAURICE GIBBONS AND MAUREEN NEUMAN

Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

—Goethe

We have always lived in an imperfect world, but never until recent times have we faced the destruction of our environment and our extinction as a species. To preserve our planet and civilization, we will have to make changes as dramatic as those that are pushing us to the brink.

Education is one powerful instrument of such change. Giving young men and women the determination and skills they need to cope with worldwide human, environmental, economic, political, and military problems will lead to a new global consciousness. We call this program the Universal Curriculum.

What Is the Universal Curriculum?

The Universal Curriculum is designed to prepare our youth to live success-

fully in an uncertain world, to make constructive contributions to their communities, and to actively pursue solutions to global problems. It is universal because it is intended for every child in every country, and it is global because it is intended to prepare a generation to create a better world.

The Universal Curriculum is based on four simple themes.

1. We are all global citizens who share a responsibility for solving the world's problems and for the creation of the world we desire.

2. We are all members of the family of humankind. We are responsible for understanding and caring for people of cultures different from our own.

3. We are all stewards of the earth, which is our home and life support system. We are responsible for maintaining and enhancing it as well as for its sensible use.

4. We are responsible for developing an attitude of peaceful cooperation in resolving our differences and developing our planetary potential.

This curriculum is intended to empower people to act responsibly and effectively in the pursuit of these four themes. The basic means of empowering participants is by teaching them the processes of successful action and providing them with experience in their use. Students study five stages in this process.

- *Study and experience.* Students examine local and global situations in order to identify and understand the crises we face and our available opportunities for solving them.

- *Planning and strategy.* They plan a course of action that will systematically solve the problems confronting us.

- *Connecting and communication.* Students establish contact with others, develop relationships, and work together to solve problems and achieve shared goals.

- *Acting and achievement.* They translate ideas and plans into successful action projects that make a difference.



● **Value and commitment.** Students establish a set of values to guide personal behavior and public action.

How Does the Universal Curriculum Work?

Imagine for a moment that a Universal Curriculum has been established in your school. Here is what would be happening.

Students are working individually and in teams on activities that grow out of the four main themes—global citizenship, family of humankind, environmental management, and cooperative conflict resolution. They are applying the five processes (study, strategy, connection, action, valuing) to an issue they have chosen in a class meeting.

One high school class has decided to study "Military conflicts around the world: why did they start and what would be necessary to establish lasting peace?" They have divided the world into zones and assigned a team to each zone to identify the conflicts. A large map dotted with pinned flags shows the results of their work. Individuals and teams are now studying selected conflicts and compiling a profile of each of them. With this information assembled and shared, they will begin the second phase, developing a strategy.

They will study strategies for settling the differences they have found, and then one group will propose the most workable approach to a world court that students will set up in their classroom. Later they will decide on a

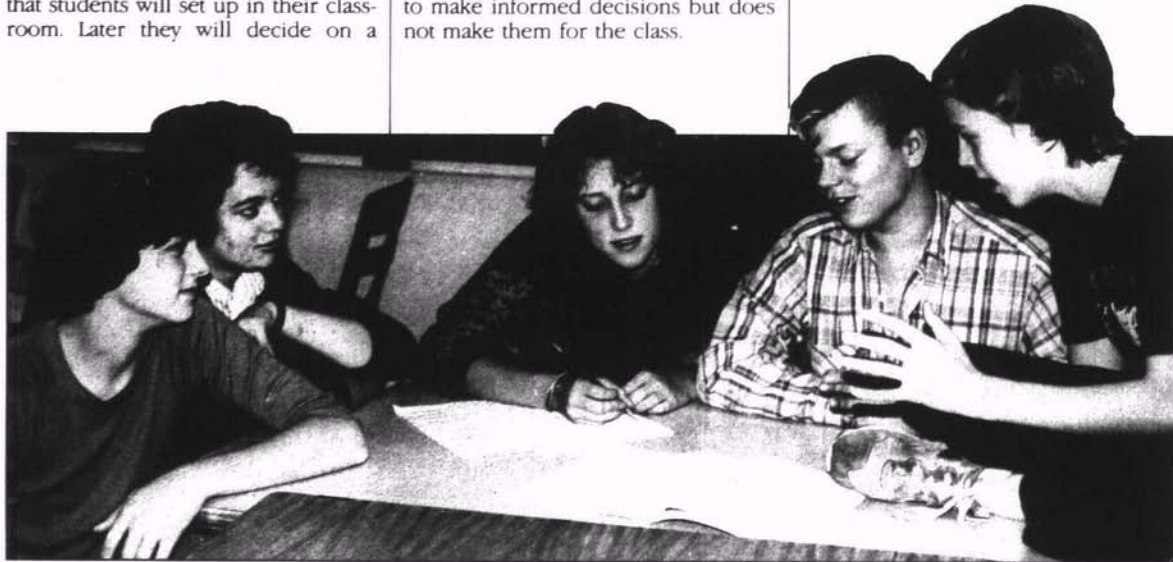
Figure 1. The Universal Curriculum	
What it is not . . .	What it is . . .
● A body of information or content. ● Mastery of subject matter for its own sake. ● Learning as a passive recipient. ● Concluded by proof of comprehension and recall by students. ● A teacher-proof curriculum decided on by external authorities. ● Presented by the teacher in the traditional role of subject-matter authority. ● Designed to socialize students to things as they are.	● A framework of concepts and processes. ● Learning for a purpose. ● Learning as an active participant. ● Concluded by action and reflection by students. ● A framework for empowering teachers to develop active, grassroots curriculum with students and the community. ● Organized by the teacher in new roles for empowering students to decide, learn, cooperate, act, and reflect. ● Designed to prepare students to make a beneficial difference in their lives, their communities, and the world.

course of action and make contact with adults and government officials. Finally, they will consider their own views on international conflict, discuss them in groups, and express them through various literary forms.

The teacher is a *learning leader*. Much of the time the teacher acts like a chair of a large committee, leading students through processes, outlining alternatives, contributing suggestions, and helping students organize—as well as taking part in the learning tasks. The teacher shows students how to make informed decisions but does not make them for the class.

The teacher interrupts the proceedings regularly to show students how a process works, to teach them skills, to coach them in their pursuit of action plans, and to encourage them to risk greater challenges. As quickly as students are able to assume roles the teacher is performing, leadership is transferred to them.

Teachers regularly find new ways to empower students, to help them develop effective action processes that



they will use the rest of their lives. Thus, students discover that they *can* make a difference.

The teacher also meets regularly with the advisory team. The team in this example includes two parents, two students, an interested fellow teacher, and sometimes the school's vice-principal. They meet to help the teacher solve the problem, "How can I empower my students in this phase of the program?" The advisory team helps the teacher determine the program's direction and decide how to help students master the processes and skills involved. The team also represents and informs the school and community about the program as it develops.

Examples

An elementary school class involved their entire school in a unit on friendship, resulting in a friendship exchange between their school and one in Japan. Another class studied endangered species around the world, discovered several threatened local species, conducted a local awareness campaign, and contacted regional authorities to press for action. The strategy called for each student to urge a public figure to speak out on the concerns that the class had identified. Nearly 30 percent of the leaders whom the class contacted complied with the students' requests, and many attended a student-organized picnic to promote protection of local endangered species. All actions were based on decisions the students made.

World Citizens for a Universal Curriculum

World Citizens for a Universal Curriculum is based in Vancouver, Canada. Launched in early 1985, it is a nonprofit organization currently seeking foundation status. Members include teachers, parents, professors, students, and other community members.

The organization's main purpose is to design and implement a curriculum that will prepare the next generation to deal with global issues summarized in the four basic themes. We intend to establish model school sites in the Vancouver area and to create a network of affiliates around the world

where the Universal Curriculum is in active use. Three school districts are currently preparing sites for implementation.

We Can Make a Difference

It is overwhelming to think of developing a Universal Curriculum that deals with the major issues confronting humankind, and so to teach a worldwide generation of young people how to save the world from destruction and to make it a better place in which to live. The task is huge, the obstacles great, the situation seemingly hopeless. What can *we* do, particularly when the efforts of the expert and powerful seem so ineffectual?

We must not be overwhelmed. Global transformation is our guiding vision, but this 1,000-mile journey begins with *a single step*. Any step we take moves us toward our destination. We begin here with a few teachers, parents, and students developing a few projects and programs: to make the uninformed knowledgeable; the isolated members of cooperative teams;

the passive active; the unskilled effective; and the uncommitted dedicated to a better world. We can all contribute to this development. Nothing we could do in education is more important for the future of our children or of our planet.

In these beginning efforts, however modest they are, we will not be alone. Every sign we see indicates that people of every age and from all parts of society are with us, waiting for us to act. We whose major concern is education must do for ourselves what we hope to teach our children; we must *believe* and *demonstrate* that we can make a difference. With our leadership, what begins as a trickle of change will soon be a river and then an irresistible torrent. We urge you to begin with us now. □

Maurice Gibbons is professor, Department of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6. **Maureen Neuman** is vice-principal of Carisbrooke Elementary School, 510 E. Carisbrooke Rd., North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7N 1N5.

The Center for Reasoning Studies announces **A NATIONAL CONFERENCE** on **TEACHING THINKING**

February 6-8, 1986
Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

- 30 major workshops
- Speakers: Barry Beyer, Claire Weinstein, Charleen Swansea
- A dozen alternative instructional approaches
- High school, gifted, and college applications
- Key research, testing, and implementation issues

Write or Call: Curtis Miles
Piedmont Technical College
P.O. Drawer 1467
Greenwood, SC 29648
(803) 223-8357



Limited to the first 300 paid participants.

Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.