



Global Classroom Program

Betty Lau

World Educator Award Essay 2005

1. What does it mean to you for someone to be a World Educator?

I think a world educator is someone who embodies three essential qualities. First is a global outlook on life. By that I mean an open minded curiosity about the world, its cultures, places and histories. Second is the ability to see interrelationships and connections between diverse peoples and cultures. Third is translating/transmitting that knowledge into practical classroom lessons and activities for students, whether young people or adults. The outcome should be students knowledgeable about other cultures other than their own, and more importantly, sensitive to cultural and religious differences while appreciative of our common humanity.

2. How have you demonstrated the above in your own work?

I have always been curious about the world, and I've always wanted to see and experience the places that I read about or studied in school. Therefore, as an adult, I decided that whenever an opportunity to travel comes up, whether it be within the US or abroad, I take it. As a result of my extensive travels and research seminars abroad (Western Europe, East Asia, East Africa, Morocco) as well as living and working abroad, I have a greater appreciation of human variations across many cultures. These experiences have stood me in good stead in the classroom by lending credibility to my history and English classes.

I don't believe in slavishly following a textbook. Rather, I take the basic curriculum and supplement it with lessons created from information, materials, and realia I've brought back from my travels. Additionally, I have a pictorial record in the form of slides to show classes. I also use newspaper and magazine articles from the dailies, other newspapers, Newsweek, and Archaeology magazines. KCTS is a great source of documentaries.

I always provide students evidence from which they can draw their own conclusions. For example, I have a unit called "Our Ancestors Were Business Partners." This unit, within World History, focuses on the branch of the Silk Road that goes by sea from China to Indonesia past Saudi Arabia to the east coast of Africa. In Zanzibar, I found many Africans including among their ancestors Chinese and Arab forbears. It's a fact that fascinates my students. I do units such as this because too often, history is taught in isolated units, country by country. Other nations come into play only when a war or a conflict breaks out. That's not the full story of human interactions and contributions to a global civilization. The evidence for ancient relationships and contact has been documented by writers such as Joseph Campbell, Jack Weatherford, Dr. Ivan Van Sertima, Dr. Barry Fell and others. I use their works and an examination of the evidence to supplement my history classes. Whether or not students accept the evidence is up to each one to decide.

However, the best way to impart global education is through the learning of world languages. I have striven and continue to strive to bring a global perspective to the school district through my efforts in promoting world languages. The Seattle Times article of July 9 was about an Arabic Language Camp. Left out of the article is the fact that I was the co-grant writer, organizer and supervisor of the 1997-1999 program to train FLES teachers in the less commonly taught languages. When funding ended, I brought together other sources of funding to continue another 4 years. Three years ago, I was



Global Classroom Program

contacted by ACE, and after a discussion, I felt that giving management of the summer language camps to ACE would be the best way for the concept to continue. I could no longer hold down a fulltime job and fund raise and organize the teacher training/language camp program. Since 1988, I have arranged for students to receive world language credit from their high schools (inside and outside of Seattle) for study in community based language schools.

Change needs to occur with teachers, too. To that end, I organized the first annual workshop on cultural information needed by Garfield staff to more effectively deal with the educational needs of immigrant and refugee students. I am a resource to other teachers. For example, an LA teacher was using a novel on Arabs that had been severely criticized and condemned by Arab groups. I compiled a list of books I had read and believed would be much better than Shabanu, Daughter of the Desert. I also gave the LA staff my copies of books I recommended about Arab and Persian (Iranian) life. In addition, I'm a resource person for the Seattle Asian Art Museum (community committee) and the Wing Luke Asian Museum. I am a guest speaker, addressing topics such as race relations (from a Chinese American perspective) China, Japan, Tanzania, Zambia, Morocco, Korea and so on.

3. How would receiving the 2005 World Educator Award help you further your work in global education?

Receiving the 2005 World Educator Award would help me further my work. It is a great honor and would be a vindication of my efforts to effect changes in curriculum so that it is more global at Garfield and in the district. I serve on the bilingual curriculum (language arts and social studies) committee, which is developing new course descriptions. I was on the high school graduation requirements committee, and persuaded the committee to add a world language requirement. Due to budget reasons, the work of the committee has been halted. But I have not given up trying to put in place world language study for all the students in our district. This requires a long range plan, and due to the budget crisis, must start with cost free steps.