

# **Reflections on International Cooperation and New Partnerships In the "Age of Globalization"**

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The "age of globalization," emerging as an increasingly familiar phrase over the past few decades, has become a focal point of both celebration and concern for the twenty-first century. The term, originating from the field of economics, took root as: the movement of goods and services, especially through trade and financial flow, across international borders. The movement has been celebrated as potentially enriching to the fostering of cooperation, collaboration, partnerships, and progress. It has also raised concern in the world of adult education. As voiced in the Declaration that emerged from the 6<sup>th</sup> World Assembly of Adult Education, held in Ochos Rios, Jamaica, during August 2001: "we have seen an economic globalisation that widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots" and "we have taken notice of the large number of people from all corners of the world who ...have expressed their profound concerns about the directions proposed by global financial actors." Simultaneously, "we have taken notice of emerging forms of active citizenship and the importance of local and grassroots activities in challenging globalisation." As reminded by the Rt. Honorable P.J. Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica in the opening address to the Assembly: "globalisation is not a tide, which necessarily lifts all boats. In fact the stark facts indicate that it sinks many" (Patterson, 2001, p. 3).

In the New Economy, however, information is heralded as an important commodity, so to speak. As enunciated by Patterson , "the global economy is today information-intensive, not material-intensive," meaning that "wealth has to be re-defined in terms of knowledge-rich *versus* knowledge-poor countries." Consequently, "people have to be constantly updating their knowledge," not just for economic growth, but for

"the values and norms necessary for democratic citizenship; ...information will make citizens aware of the challenges, threats, and opportunities of globalisation" (pp. 4-5). Accordingly, the term globalization has come to mean much more in the world of adult education. Perhaps we may adapt Kennedy's (2000) descriptive definition of globalisation in this way to focus on "knowledge" rather than "material": globalisation as the increasing integration between all societies on the Earth, aided by the vast amount of knowledge each has and sharing this knowledge through such worldwide media as the internet and television, by increased knowledge sharing opportunities, by learner and learning exchanges, by massive investments of private knowledge capital in each others overseas countries, by cultural interactions and through international organizations. Franz Poggeler (2000), reflecting upon his writings and thoughts over the years, also reminds us that in the past "nationalistic imperialism [has] ended in a catastrophe of narrow-mindedness" (p. 1). He urges all adult educators to consider the term "globalization" as a way of thinking as "One World."

Globalization in both theory and practice, however, is emerging within the context of what has been termed the postmodern movement, ushering in a world in which multi-modal epistemologies and plurality of voices is heralded. Out of the postmodern framework has emerged constructivism, which in practical terms is expressed as the movement toward diversity and inclusiveness, recognizing that cultural ways of being create different perception on the same phenomena. In essence, however, postmodernism presupposes a developmental prerequisite that one is able to sustain the tension inherent in having multiple perspectives existing side by side because one is able to grasp and embrace the greater whole of which the perspectives are part.

The meaning in life derived from being and feeling a part of a greater whole is called homonomy and is a complementary developmental trajectory to autonomy (development of the individual, unique, autonomous separate self-sense). As discussed in earlier papers (for example, Boucouvalas, 1988, 1999), these terms apply to development of individuals, relationships, groups, organizations, and nations. Individuals develop healthy autonomy, but derive meaning also from identifying with a relationship, group, or even nationalistic fervor. Groups, organizations, nations likewise develop autonomous identities. Any time the autonomous identity truncates off, however, and fails to see or identify with the larger whole of which it is part centrisms arise, some of which can be deadly.

Being that we hail from the USA, this backdrop holds special significance for us at this moment in history. Given the now well-known events of September 11, we -- as United States citizens and residents but also as global creatures -- recognize that Americans have been given an opportunity to better understand the suffering of humanity that we have now joined. In other words, we can no longer stand outside of where pain and sorrow exist in the world. We have been "terrorized" and the lesson is huge for our own further development. As citizens of the world we must learn the adverse ramifications of attempting to maintain an autonomous identity as Americans without equally embracing the larger whole (i.e. the world) of which we are part.

We arrive here in Germany, then, with that perspective to offer our thoughts, as we have been requested, on "international cooperation and new partnerships." Three questions have been posed to us that we will address accordingly. How and with what attitude we choose to connect, however, is as important as why.

*1. Which are the new aims and forms of international cooperation in this age of globalization?*

In the Cape Town Statement, developed with the background of the UNESCO Confintea V Conference in 1997 and the Higher Education 1998 Conference, the Mumbai Statement of 1998, research from both the “first” world and “third” world perspectives, and with the aid of considerable discussion at an international conference with numerous adult educators from twenty-three (23) countries, the following is suggested as one answer to the first question.

“International partnerships and linkages are when lifelong learning institutions in the globalising world strive for a broad exchange on teaching learning systems, and collaboration across national boundaries. This is for: sharing knowledge and know-how; partnerships and alliances based on common interest, mutual respect and desire to attain; see a justice globally and locally; enhancing the sharing of skills, research opportunities, and staff and student development.” This certainly would be supported when a **record** is kept by the parties (nations, institutions, individuals, groups, societies, etc.) involved at these various levels of the extent of exchange, sharing of skills, research opportunities, learner and personnel development, and collaboration across national boundaries.

The basic new aim and form of international cooperation is when all of us (including us Americans) take learning as a master concept and regard it as the continuous and never complete development, changes, and adaptation in human consciousness that occur partly through deliberate action but even more as a result of the business of living, where learning may be intentional or unintentional that includes acquiring greater understanding of other people and the world at large, based on DeLors

(1998) four pillars: being, knowing, doing, and living together. This certainly will transform our cooperation and elevate it to heights worthy of the requirements of the new millennium.

## *2. - not a few possible new partners*

Every institution, group, level of government, corporation, educational institution, health care agency, social service agency, religious institution, financial, civic group, service club, informal group, friends, marginalized social groups, family, etc., are possible new partners in this extremely important enterprise of international cooperation. However, not to be overlooked are the educators and learners, who having been in the teaching-learning transaction for so long they may have become hazy in their conception of cooperation, are now ready for a fresh or re-focused vision of learning.

They will be the people who accept everyone as intelligent, whose opinions are worthy of being listened to, honored, and appreciated. They will exemplify and model learning in their everyday life. They will challenge each learner's intelligence just beyond their present learning abilities. They will expect to be treated as unique and with respect, take charge of themselves in self-directed learning, engage actively in the process of learning, & seek intellectual challenge. The institutions who support this cooperation will provide adequate learning resources, a work system and an atmosphere that is people-centered, caring, warm, informal, intimate, supportive, and trusting. (Billington, 1988; Cho, 2001; Henschke, 2000).

### *3. Do we need global players in adult education?*

Kennedy (2000) suggests that roughly speaking the peoples of the Earth are divided into two types, those in what are called developed regions which are rich, technology-heavy societies, and those termed developing countries which are usually much poorer and have great social and economic deficits. In the next 50 years, the richer lands are hardly expected to increase in population at all; whereas, the developing regions are expected to grow very rapidly, indeed.

The international cooperation that we seek, needs global players who have some understanding of this complicated dilemma, and are committed to somehow address this situation constructively, and with humility. As this author reflects, the importance of having learned from experience comes into play at this juncture. Both authors of this paper have been involved in numerous teaching/learning cooperative ventures in a wide variety of cultures and nations.

Having worked with adult learners from seventy-three (73) different countries, and conducting programs in thirteen (13) countries with learners from fifty (50) countries, there are some insights gleaned from these experiences. It is of utmost importance to be “with” those that represent other cultures and nations. This means that the ground upon which the cooperation is based is level – each party to the cooperation is of equal standing, worth, value, intelligence and stature. The exchange is for a mutual sharing of resources, fully knowing that each will learn from the other, while honoring and expressing gratefulness for this reality. It is especially exhilarating and energizing to realize I have learned that learners are the same as learners around the world. The

process is the same, because learning is a human process. No matter the setting, culture, context, or nation, people as learners, learn by the same internal process. The light of learning shines on all living on this globe.

Taylor, et al. (2000) provides some especially cogent insights for global players in international cooperation to consider. They mark intentional learner development along at least five dimensions, toward: knowing as a dialogical process; a dialogical relationship with oneself; being a continuous learner; self-agency and self-authorship; and, connection with others. They provide more than two hundred (200) strategies and exercises of learning in the following areas: assessing, collaborating, experimenting, imagining, inquiring, performing-simulating, and reflecting. It would appear that this is the “stuff” out of which international cooperation and global players are made.

Ma Shuping (1999), President of the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences, and a deeply committed adult educator, uttered what I consider to be a riveting concept that may bring together this idea of international cooperation in a fresh way. At the International Symposium on the Theory and Practice of Lifelong Education where I gave the Keynote Address, Shuping looked at all the adult educators gathered from around the world in the conference hall, and said, “We are all in the same family – the family of adult educators. We all have the same goals and desires – the well-being of those we serve.”

We, as professionals in adult learning from the United States, with pain and suffering now not unlike those from other countries and cultures (albeit only a glimpse), are ready and desiring to experience the new joy of cooperation with others around the world in this family of adult educators for our mutual benefit – in becoming knowledge-



rich. We are poised to engage in this new – yet long-standing – venture. Moreover, as representatives of the International aspects of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE), we are ready to lock arms with you to move forward on this important worldwide enterprise – International Cooperation and A New Partnership in this Age of Globalization.

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