

# Learning for Change in a Global Village

—memories and anxieties over the years



## Prologue

It's 4.45 in the afternoon of Friday 19 November 1948. The occasion is a meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris.

The voice heard at 4.45 pm this day is not that of a delegate but of someone claiming to represent 'we the people' of the whole world.

A young American, Garry Davis, has risen to his feet in the public gallery and has started to read aloud a declaration he has prepared in advance.

He has barely uttered a single word, however, before he is pounced on by security guards and arrested, then unceremoniously dragged to the nearest exit, and roughly evicted. His speech is read instead by a friend and ally, one Robert Sarrazac, but he too is arrested and evicted.

The speech composed by Davis, delivered shortly afterwards in the nearby *Trocadéro* restaurant, contains the following declaratory words:

**Mr President, gentlemen. I interrupt you in the name of the peoples of the world who are not represented here ... We ordinary people want the peace which only a world government can give.**

**The sovereign nation-states which you represent here are divisive, and are leading us to the very brink of war.**

**I appeal to you to convene immediately a world assembly which will raise a flag around which all people everywhere may gather, the flag of a single government for a single world.**

Friends and supporters of Davis and Sarrazac present at the restaurant include the Nobel Prize winning philosopher and author Albert Camus, the leading surrealist artist André Breton, and Abbé Pierre, founder of the Emmaus movement combating homelessness. *Nous sommes tous citoyens du monde*, it is said, we are all citizens of the world. Over the next six decades, Davis will refuse to own and carry a passport and will be detained and imprisoned more than 30 times in nine different countries. He will also, incidentally, act from time to time as an understudy for the great comic actor Danny Kaye.

In the UK supporters of Davis's vision, though not of his brazen and flamboyant methods, include members of parliament who have recently founded a body known as the All-Party Parliamentary Group for World Government (APPGWG). A year or two later, they will found a charity in London known as the One World Trust (<https://www.oneworldtrust.org/early-history>).

## **One World Trust**

The One World Trust, for its part, raised sufficient funds in due course for it to be able to set up a project whose formal purpose would be to:

**... encourage modification of syllabuses at secondary school level to reflect a world perspective rather than a national perspective, so that an opportunity is given in the curriculum for balancing national loyalty with a measure of conscious loyalty to the human race as a whole in all its diversity.**

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## **World Studies Project**

The steering committee which the One World Trust set up to supervise its world studies project, as it came to be known, was jointly chaired by Shirley Williams MP and Dr James Henderson, a lecturer at the University of London Institute of Education and author of many books on education about current world affairs and issues. Also, he was chairman of the World Education Fellowship, a body founded in 1921 whose central focus was 'child-centred

education, social reform through education, democracy, world citizenship, international understanding and the promulgation of world peace’.

The project began its full-time work on 1 January 1973.

As evoked by the prologue above, recalling an episode in Paris 25 years earlier, the project had to steer a course between, on the one hand, the views and voices of nations and national governments and, on the other, the demands, dramas and desires of ‘we the people’.

Including we the teachers. And we the learners.

Other voices whose work influenced the World Studies Project as it took shape in the 1970s included those of the following:

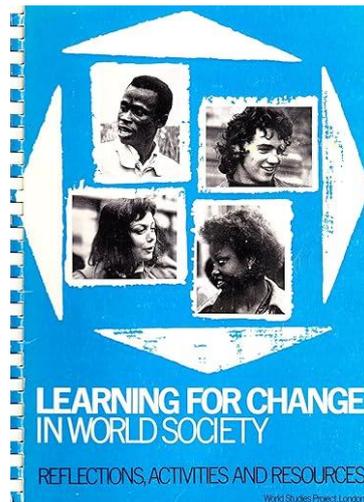
- **Betty Reardon** (12 June 1929 —3 November 2023), educationist and activist associated in the 1970s with the Institute for World Order, New York
- **David Wolsk** (29 May 1930 — 21 April 2005), an educational psychologist based in Canada, the development of an ‘experience-centred’ curriculum, commissioned and published by Unesco
- **Jerome Bruner** (1 October 1915 — 2016), principal inspiration of *Man A Course of Study*, a curriculum whose foundational aim was ‘to leave pupils with a lively sense of the unfinished business of human evolution’
- **Johan Galtung** (24 October 1930—17 February 2024), his fundamental concepts of structural violence and cultural violence
- **Paulo Freire** (18 September 1921—2 March 1997), his emphasis on liberation and consciousness-raising as distinct from what he called domestication in schools and universities

The principal publication of the World Studies Project in due course was a practical handbook for classroom teachers entitled *Learning for Change in World Society: reflections, activities and resources*. This contained much use of collaborative activities and exercises in small groups; games and simulations; fiction and drama; photographs, cartoons and posters; stories, legends and fables; and engagement with local political issues.

The principles underlying such pedagogy were later summarised by Patrick Whitaker, who at the time was the headteacher of a primary school in Leicestershire:

- **In schools the emphasis should be on learning how to learn, not simply the accumulation of facts.**
- **Learning is a process, not a destination.**
- **Pupils and teachers should relate to each other as people and not behave towards each other only in roles.**

- **The inner intuitive, emotional and spiritual experiences of pupils should be regarded as vital contexts for their learning.**
- **Encouragement should be given to divergent thinking and guesswork as part of the natural process of creative learning.**
- **Greater attention should be given to the design of the learning environment with more attention to colour, comfort, personal space and privacy.**
- **Teachers should be regarded as learners too, learning alongside and from the pupils they teach.**



In short, peace and justice were seen not only as the goals and content of world studies but also as essential components of the pedagogy and practical methodology, namely parts of the process. In individual schools and individual classrooms there had to be peace in the relations between teachers and learners, and between learners and each other — and peace not only as the absence of disorder but also in the sense of dismantling structural and cultural violence, and of building and maintaining a culture in which all people are co-learners.

With regard to curriculum content as distinct from matters of pedagogy, process and context, the World Studies Project focused on (a) war and peace (b) sustainable development (c) human rights and social justice, and (d) ecological balance; and on six overarching sets of concepts or 'big ideas', named as shared humanity; identity, belonging and difference; globalisation and the global village; learning from other places and times; conflict resolution and justice; and open and closed minds. These six ideas were in due course briefly summarised at <https://www.patience-and-passion.org/pdfs/Big%20ideas%20across%20the%20curriculum.pdf>

The first phase of the World Studies Project ended in 1979. Its ideas and ideals were continued and developed, however, in a project entitled World Studies 8-13, which was jointly sponsored by the One World Trust and the Centre for Peace Studies based at St Martin's College, Lancaster, led by David Hicks and Simon Fisher.

Further, the classroom methodology used and promoted by the World Studies Project was extended to the inservice training and continuing professional development of teachers, for example through its publication *Debate and Decision—schools in a world of change*, 1979.

## **Development education and global education**

Also, and even more significantly and effectively, world studies was developed and expanded in the field known as development education. The close connections between peace and development had been dramatically enacted at a peace education conference held at the University of Keele in September 1974, organised under the auspices of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI), based in the United States.

One of the sessions at this conference featured a meeting and discussion between Johan Galtung, one of the world's leading theorists about peace, and Paulo Freire, one of the world's leading theorists about the concept of development. The two of them met for the first time on the conference platform itself, and spontaneously embraced each other. In the course of their conversation Galtung declared 'Peace is another name for development, development is another name for peace'.

In the UK development education was energetically and inspirationally led by a network of development education centres, known as DECs. These were in the first instance funded by charities and NGOs concerned with overseas aid and development, but in due course they received significant funds from central government. A professorial chair was set up at the London Institute of Education, as was an academic journal.

For practitioners an association entitled TIDE ('Teachers in Development Education') was set up based in the West Midlands, and a lively magazine was started, entitled *Elephant Times*. The name of this magazine was derived from a session at a peace education conference that had taken place at Atlantic College in 1981. The speaker had suggested that conversations and disputes about terminology were reminiscent of that ancient and famous Indian fable about six blind people trying and failing to understand the nature of an elephant, based solely on the extremely fragmentary knowledge which each of them had. To know the whole elephant you needed political education *and*

development education *and* multicultural education *and* peace education *and* antisexist education *and* social and personal education.

In summer 2024 the fable was revisited and updated, and can be read in its revised form at <https://www.patience-and-passion.org/>

In due course the TIDE network adopted the term global learning to summarise its concerns and it issued a formal statement which began:

**We have come to understand that global education is as much about *how* people teach and learn as about *what* they teach and learn.**

**Global learning is not about new subjects or new timetabled content. Instead we have worked collaboratively with teachers, and through their students, to develop projects about all aspects of the life of a school: the so-called hidden curriculum, the subjects taught, and extracurricular activities, since these offer opportunities to develop children's and young people's skills, dispositions, knowledge and understanding for effective participation in today's interconnected and complex world.**

It is interesting to compare the two versions of Elephant Education – the one compiled for the Peace Education conference at Atlantic College in 1981 and dating from summer 2024.

The first of these terminated with failure, remorse and despairing grief:

**[The six blind persons failed] ... to realise any of the values which they wished to promote and failed to avert any of the threats to which they wished to respond, They failed even to live out the short span of their own lives with integrity and with love.**

The second re-telling of the ancient fable similarly ended with failure, namely with the six partially sighted research teams failing to satisfy the government of their time and place ('the emperor'). They did, though, come to some agreement amongst themselves:

**... The more they talked and argued, the more they listened to each other. From their talking and listening they came to two agreed conclusions:**

**... In all education, whatever the content, process is as important as content – 'how' is as important as 'what': the artistry and inspiration of teachers, and the space and autonomy that teachers need; relationships and trust between teachers and learners; the**

**activities, practices, games and exercises that teachers plan and use; engagement of the brain's right hemisphere; how to deal with controversial and sensitive issues; how to grow and show respect for each individual learner; and how to develop confidence, curiosity, challenge, resilience, and creativity.**

**All their reports contained much the same recurring key concepts and fundamental ideas: 'metacrisis', 'interdependent', 'interconnected', 'othering', 'polarising', 'vicious circle', 'belonging', 'evolution', 'flow', 'nondual', 'compassion', 'the open and the closed mind', 'trauma', 'structural', 'systemic', 'without contraries there is no progression', 'paradox', 'unknowing', 'right hemisphere', 'unfinished'.**

**They told the emperor.**

**'Really?' said the emperor. 'Unfinished is your last word?'**

**'Yes, indeed.'**

**'I am surprised,' said the emperor, 'and I am very disappointed.'**

The disappointment of the fictitious emperor in the revised fable was matched in the real world of many western societies from about 2015 onwards. In the UK, the country's retreat from internationalism and world citizenship ('nous sommes tous citoyens du monde') was signalled by Brexit in 2016; and retreat from equality and social justice in domestic affairs was signalled by increasing disdain and disregard for equalities legislation, ridiculed as political correctness gone mad and mere wokery and wokeness.

There was analogous disdain and disregard for diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) in the United States, and increasing nostalgia for making America great again (MAGA) in US foreign policy. As of summer 2025, it looked increasingly, in many parts of the world, that the ideals and decisions of the late 1940s, recalled at the start of this brief historical review, were no longer worth taking seriously.

So, so what if anything next, what if anything now?

Yes, well, wait and see? Or at least wait and speculate a bit?. And perhaps at least look back a bit, look back on passions and times of patience over the last few decades years — passions, pains and hurts, defeats and despairs, and moments of standing back, remembering, reflecting.

For example, through the compilation of an archival scrapbook, whose aims are:

- to recall episodes, issues and topics in the education systems of the United Kingdom during the last 60 years, as seen and experienced by one person
- to greet, acknowledge and pay tribute to colleagues, comrades and mentors who lived and worked through some or all of the same 60 years
- to compose a resource containing reflections, ideas, memories and warnings that may be helpful in the future for researchers, practitioners, managers, campaigners and change agents, and for the initial training and continuing development of staff.

The scrapbook's address is [www.patience-and-passion.org](http://www.patience-and-passion.org).

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Elsewhere in this website:

'Big Ideas across the Curriculum: topics and teaching'  
<https://www.patience-and-passion.org/pdfs/Big%20ideas%20across%20the%20curriculum.pdf>.

'Earlier Loves and Enlarged Allegiances: four decades in one world, a journey' <https://www.patience-andpassion.org/pdfs/Earlier%20Loves.pdf>

**Source:** adapted from part of an article for the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), Oslo, edited by Robin Burns and Magnus Haavelsrud, to be published in November 2025.