

Rethinking Schools

AN URBAN EDUCATION RESOURCE *online*

Educate for Global Justice: A Key Lesson from Sept. 11

The last year has not been an easy time for educators. After the deadly events of September 11, 2001, we all needed to help students grieve, to help them try to make sense of an event that shattered so many lives. Then we had to respond to the war in Afghanistan, the demand for patriotism at all costs, the demonization of those who questioned the status quo or those who simply resembled the 9/11 hijackers in any way, and the stripping of our civil liberties in the name of security.

As educators committed to social justice, we believe that students need something different than a daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Whether we teach elementary students or older ones, young people need global education. All students, starting with the youngest, need to develop empathy for people who are different or live under different conditions. They need to learn basic geography and history and they must unlearn damaging stereotypes. And we can help students develop other critical skills: to question the policies of our government, to consider alternatives, to ask about who benefits and who suffers from particular policy choices, to evaluate media coverage of world events. We need to direct students' attention to the broad trends that continue to make the world an unequal and dangerous place.

We believe that the ability of fundamentalists of all stripes to sustain themselves and gain new recruits rests principally on the widespread despair and oppression that hundreds of millions of people experience daily. The old adage "without justice there is no peace" has never been more true.

Our students live in a society that makes up about 5 percent of the world's population, but consumes more than a third of the world's wealth and creates half of the world's non-organic waste. Our government's policies dominate international affairs. The U.S. government refuses to sign international treaties ranging from child labor and women's rights to global warming and international war crimes. The United States is the world's top spender and exporter of weapons. U.S.-based transnational corporations employ millions of people under sweatshop conditions, pollute the environment, and move at a whim to increase profit margins.

Because the United States dominates the world in numerous ways, and because this world has grown increasingly perilous, we believe that it is the responsibility of teachers, professional organizations, schools, and districts to promote a rigorous global justice education. We recognize that this challenges the national emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing. But the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and the "war on terrorism" that followed demonstrate that a deep knowledge of global dynamics has become a "basic skill." This is the world our students will inherit; they ought to understand it.

As we go to press, the Bush administration has made clear that it intends to overthrow Saddam Hussein through military intervention. Our nation teeters on the precipice of all-out war with the lives of American soldiers and Iraqi soldiers and citizens hanging in the balance. Will young people simply become cheerleaders for war, or will they pause and ask critical questions about the roots of this intervention and its purposes? In large part, how they respond depends on the quality of global education they are exposed to.



Rethinking Schools has attempted to contribute to this effort in a number of ways. We have updated and reprinted our special edition, *War, Terrorism and Our Classrooms: A Special Report on Teaching in the Aftermath of the September 11th Tragedy* and have mailed it out to over 60,000 teachers around the country. We encourage readers to have their schools and professional organizations order it in bulk to share with colleagues. We also recently published a 400-page book, *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. It is filled with background readings, interviews, role plays, simulations, stories, poetry, lesson plans, and resources for how teachers can engage students in acquiring a critical global literacy. Finally we will continue to cover global justice issues in our quarterly journal and our website, www.rethinkingschools.org. With this edition of our journal we are launching a regular column on global justice education by high school teacher and *Rethinking Schools* editor Bill Bigelow.

We invite you to use our materials, but also to share your own ideas and resources by contributing articles to *Rethinking Schools* or discussing these issues on our critical teaching listserv (see [Listserv](#)) Join us in helping turn schools into places that contribute to building a more just and peaceful world.

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