

CHANGING THE WORLD, WALKING THE TALK: GLOBAL ISSUES HANDS-ON IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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I'd like to say to us as educators: poor are those among us who lose their capacity to dream, to create their courage to denounce and announce... -- Paolo Freire

The elephant in the room of EFL pedagogy

We live in extraordinary times. Many of us think it is a singular turning point in the history of the human race and its experiment on earth. As Chris Hedges (2012) reminds us: “The demented project of endless capitalist expansion, profligate consumption, senseless exploitation and industrial growth is now imploding.” Jeff Noonan (2012, p. 1) shares that view: “The struggles across the Middle East and North Africa and on-going resistance to austerity in Europe catalysed a fightback in North America – the Occupy Movement – that no one saw coming. Together, all testify to the pervasive and deepening crisis of capitalism, not just as an economic system, but as a comprehensive way of living and valuing [...] The growing material, social, and cultural-spiritual exhaustion of capitalist civilization is becoming more evident to ever more numbers of people.” (Noonan, 2012, p. 1). Across the planet, there are powerful new struggles for social justice and economic equity crystallizing in many countries.

Look at this image below, created by Banksy, the radical British graphic and street artist, in September 2006 in Los Angeles. What do you see? What is the metaphor? Ask students, begin an introduction to GI with this image.



[flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com/photos/banksy/1000000000/) <<http://goo.gl/aWkP0>>

Banksy entitled it: “Global Poverty.” The image is of the metaphor in English: “the elephant in the room.” It means a very big problem people don’t want to talk about, a topic that is central but somehow taboo, in convenient to discuss. So people avoid it, like the girl quietly reading in her lushly furnished living room, expensive artwork embellishing its walls. Many topics that are global issues are “elephants in the room,” especially in North America and Europe, the wealthier Global North. George Orwell once wrote: “To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.” He was referring to the myriad problems in society and the economy in his world, but also by extension in ours. Another expression is the oxymoron “eyes wide shut” -- being somehow ‘intentionally blind’ to a situation or problem, or asleep to an interwoven set of problems. It was popularized by the 1999 Kubrick film of the same title. Many of the issues we could deal with in the EFL classroom in looking at the problems of the world, and your local community, the situation

here in Bulgaria, are ones the schools may now approach “eyes wide shut” or effectively marginalize and silence in the discursive din of set curricula.

Global Issues as a pedagogical focus in a ‘Critical CLIL’

Global Issues are also a kind of elephant in the room of English teaching, much too rarely explored in our work with students and interchange with professional colleagues. In our view, GI should be at the heart of a turn to a more progressive ‘critical CLIL’ that looks to building *critical* “intercultural knowledge and understanding” (<http://bit.ly/HJaOIZ>) and a far more critical and engaged “citizenship curriculum” (<http://bit.ly/HdRq5g>). In Europe, this should, we would argue, be integrated into the work of the Comenius Programme of the European Commission and its promotion of learning for active citizenship (<http://bit.ly/HoNBZn>) and the Erasmus initiatives in higher education. Significantly, Reilly (2012: 9, 5) suggests that the current ‘Gen Y’ born in the 1980s and early 90s, tech-savvy ‘screenagers,’ ‘digital natives,’ prefer topics in EFL dealing with issues like ecology, climate change, contemporary social problems, and working critically hands-on with youtube videos, as more “kinesthetic and visual learners.” Moreover, such a ‘critical CLIL’ can be framed in the pedagogy of what is know as ‘social constructivism’ in the classroom, which “values questioning, reasoning, analysis, reflection, problem-solving, cooperation, and creativity among the intellectual assets that children will need in school and in life beyond school” (Crawford & Reyes, 2011: 13).

A banner at a demonstration in Europe in 2011 as part of the international “Occupy Education” movement stated: “education can, and should be, dangerous” – confronting what is really happening in the world. Global Issues as a cross-curriculum focus belongs in the ESL classroom, central to a more radical ‘critical CLIL.’ Linking the learning of English with the study of the world's problems --. what could be more exciting and relevant to learners and their teachers everywhere? Within IATEFL, the Special interest Group GISIG deals with this. You can connect with GISIG at <http://gisig.iatefl.org> and also join the GISIG group on NING at no cost: <http://global-issues.ning.com>.

Opening ‘eyes wide shut’: setting out in the classroom

In beginning, one way to start is to show intermediate level students this short video about the “lottery of birth” Many important things are said in three minutes: <http://bit.ly/HdvZ7F> . They can discuss how the “lottery” of their birth has put them in a social and economic and political place, and what that means. Global Issues should always be linked up with local issues in the community, and personal issues in students’ lives. In introducing GI, The First Law on Holes --- “when you're in one, stop digging!” – is a good place to break first ground. Ask learners, or colleagues in a presentation/workshop on GI, to give some examples about the many many holes we find ourselves in across the planet. These are multiple converging crises, interconnected:

Climate catastrophe * fossil fuel depletion * energy scarcity * peak oil * economic crisis and instability * food insecurity * massive global inequality and poverty * youth unemployment * the 99% waking up to control by the 1% * terrorism and its causes * militarization of democracies * privatization of health, education, nearly everything * maximizing consumption, profit * the “end of growth” * the intensified class war of the wealthy on the working masses * a global System in crisis! Failure of the existing model that is dysfunctional *

With younger learners, one approach is to get them thinking about the worldwide problem of child labor. Here a good brief youtube: <http://bit.ly/H9Okod> The Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy (2011b), in an interview on the now worldwide Occupy movement, entitled the piece “The People Who Created the Crisis Will Not Be the Ones That Come Up With a Solution”. In a powerful youtube speech, Roy (2011a) stresses: “This struggle has re-awakened our imagination. Somewhere along the way, capitalism reduced the idea of justice to mean just ‘human rights’, and the idea of dreaming of equality became blasphemous. We are not fighting to just tinker with reforming a system that needs to be replaced.” Noam Chomsky (2012a: 127) stresses: ““Part of what functioning, free communities like the Occupy communities can be working for and spreading to others is just a different way of living, which is not based on maximizing consumer goods, but on maximizing values that are important for life.”

Avery (2012) reminds us of the stark reality: “Today 2.7 billion people live on less than \$2 a day - 1.1 billion on less than \$1 per day. 18 million of our fellow humans die each year from poverty-related causes. [...] Meanwhile, in 2011, world military budgets reached a total of \$2,157,172,000,000 dollars (i.e. 2.157 million million dollars).” In France, the Front de Gauche of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (here his blog: <http://www.jean-luc-melenchon.fr>) waged a campaign in the spring of 2012 uniting many radical left forces, and calling for a 6th Republic, a transformed French commonwealth of the people. Students can translate his blog into English at Google, and explore what he’s saying. Here a video in English: <http://bit.ly/Htry4w> .

Another GI focus is the consumer society endlessly expanding around us. Is ‘commodification’ and consumerism the “essence of our time”? Leys & Harriss-White (2012) argue just that, noting:

The commodification of eating involves a big increase in the consumption of take-away meals, fewer family meals, and children often no longer learning how to cook, or knowing what constitutes a healthy diet, leading in turn to obesity and other serious health problems. One result of the commodification of entertainment transforms creative leisure activity into passive and private consumption - solitary hours spent playing computer games, with complex social and cultural consequences.

Students can discuss their own relations to consumerism, endless advertising, and imagine a society in which all this is transformed. Transition Towns (see below, conclusion of paper) is about that. In Bulgaria and other countries in the old state-socialist bloc, there was almost no advertising anywhere before 1990. Citizens were not molded primarily as consumers of privately manufactured products.

Teaching GI is about identifying the holes, learning how to cut through the noise and get informed. And finding the courage and community to take action to change things, “to dream ... denounce and announce” those who wield power and run the System. As *Rethinking Schools* (editors 2011) recently observed: “the strategy of deregulation, privatization, and decimation of the public sector that has wreaked havoc around the world has become the dominant strategy in the United States as well. The imperatives of our economic system privilege profit over every other consideration—including children’s welfare, worker dignity, and ecological sustainability.” Political imagination in many corners, among people young and older, is now in the process of rapid change -- part of

the long struggle against the ethos of “Gain wealth forgetting all but self” (Chomsky n.d.). It is a ripe time for GI pedagogy across the curriculum.

Getting started systematically online

If you have the technology, start with a student-created video: “If I could change the world ...”, by students at the University of Prince Edward Island, in Canada. URL: <http://tinyurl.com/coazl2p> . These students are in a required first-year course at UPEI, Global Issues 151, this 2008 video their joint project. It begins with two questions: “What’s going on in the world today?” “Why should I care?” Students sitting in a lecture hall hold up signs, small posters, computer screens, with ‘messages’ identifying what GI is all about. The simple videography is superb in cutting from one student + topic to another. One section asks: “Who has the power to fix this?” Another wonders: “What can we do?” Still another asks: Why do I care?” In less than six minutes, with soft musical background, the video gives a kind of inventory, multimedia. Not a word is spoken.

Show it several times: ask learners/colleagues what they see, notice. The final shots are students suggesting a few solutions, even personal, to the holes humankind is stuck in. “A ripple becomes a wave” is one of the ideas one student holds up. The Occupy movement (OWS) that started in Manhattan is a precise example of that. So is the Arab uprising that began in Tunisia and has ignited the Middle East. The video ends with Gandhi’s timeless call to us all: “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Experiment with this video. Does it work with your students? How? What can be changed, supplemented?

Get loud!

This can be followed, perhaps even in the same hour, by another Canadian video, “Get Loud: Youth Speak Out on Global Issues” URL: <http://tinyurl.com/74hp4my> It looks at social justice issues, with several young local activists in Canada talking about how to deconstruct the media, and organize together, acting to create change. The video has a second part: <http://tinyurl.com/7afp4xj> It provides many ideas for concrete action, giving students & colleagues new angles on effecting sustainable change and turning talk into walk, an idea echoed in Maley (2011).

‘Peak everything’

Heinberg on peak oil is lucid, and central to the holes we’re in: <http://tinyurl.com/89vgw79>

All this is connected with living in a simpler world after the dwindling and eventual disappearance in this century of carbon-based fossil fuels and their energy: goodbye coal, oil, natural gas, and much of the high-energy world at the center of industrial society. A good site for looking at this is <http://postcarbon.org> , the website of the Post Carbon Institute, where Heinberg is based. He has an excellent book *The End of Growth* (2011), and has written nine others: <http://richardheinberg.com/bookshelf> , including *The Party’s Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies* (2003).. Nafeez Ahmed agrees with analysts who think we are already some six years past the point of peak oil, and that this tipping point in industrial civilization has already been reached. That is what we should be discussing with our students.

“The Crisis of Civilization”

British political scientist Nafeez Ahmed, from a Bangladeshi family background, runs a think tank (<http://iprd.org.uk>) that looks in depth at many current global problems of capitalism in their interconnectedness, the System in critical crisis, and discusses

alternatives for a more sustainable future, after peak oil. His film “The Crisis of Civilization” is brilliant and available as a download online: <http://bit.ly/GNAVSy> Watch it! Show to students. Discuss various sections!

Three key resource books

The videos can be combined with an array of GI lesson plans. A good resource book is R. Sampedro and S. Hillyard, *Global Issues* (Oxford UP 2004). It has 45 activity units organized in three sections: “Awareness Raising,” “Personal Experiences” and “Major Global Issues.” Many units address the students’ own personal world, engaging their “heartspace” -- where their deepest interests come from, their most powerful energy -- (Fletcher 2011), building on *their* experiences, perceptions, communities. This is essential to GI pedagogy. Poverty is not about some African slum family but exists everywhere, perhaps next door. Little rain is not just a problem in some distant stretch of the Global South – much of Europe today is facing a severe drought, impacting on major river ecosystems, agriculture.

Sampedro/Hillyard can be expanded by a new resource book from the Czech Republic, edited by Martina Pavlíčková & James Thomas, *Global Issues in the ELT Classroom* (Brno: Společnost pro Fair Trade 2008). The book, an ELTons prizewinner, was discussed in the previous *GISIG Newsletter* #27 (pp. 21-24). It contains 32 lesson plans, arranged at three different language levels. Contents: <http://tinyurl.com/c7dlegt> A readable discussion of the book is Thompson (2010). One problem is that to date it can only be ordered online from the Czech site: <http://tinyurl.com/btgq33o>

A sample lesson from the book on early marriage in Afghanistan: tinyurl.com/cm268bj Although a well-structured unit, one can wonder whether students in the West may perceive this as a problem of how ‘backward’ rural Afghan Muslims treat their girls, ‘gender inequality’ viewed through a Euro-Atlantic prism. Women’s issues can be a strong focus for GI in many classrooms. Here a VOA Special English video in simpler English on International Women’s Day: <http://bit.ly/HupGun> . Here a powerful statement o women’s rights by a U.S. presidential candidate on the left, Peta Lindsay: <http://bit.ly/I13FmW>

A third valuable textbook, published in Bucarest by the British Council, is M. Carianopol et al. (2002) -- a book on social justice I’ve reviewed elsewhere (Templer 2002). The syllabus is online: <http://tinyurl.com/7z67z6z> *Rights in Deed* remains an excellent idea-loaded resource for Global Issues pedagogy; although still in print, it has not received the distribution it deserves outside Romania. Brown & Popovici (2005) provide an evaluation of the substantial impact in Romania of this unique textbook for ELT and human rights education.

Global

Another useful site for introducing GI is *Global*, the general English course for adults written by Lindsay Clandfield and promoted by Macmillan: <http://tinyurl.com/2b8qsjn> . See X. Wang’s (2011) review for GISIG. It now has over 90 downloadable lessons, such as this on world population at 7 billion: <http://tinyurl.com/cwoeo7v> .

Roma on all peripheries

Classes in Central or Eastern Europe addressing poverty and discrimination should, in my view, contain a unit on Europe’s pariah underclass, the Roma. Prejudice toward the Roma is endemic even among the youngest generation of pupils and college students across the

region. Addressing such problems and attitudes is crucial in GI pedagogy engages learner life worlds, their own front yard and commonly held and reproduced stereotypes . Carianopol et al. (2002) contains several texts dealing with the situation of the Roma in Romania. Arguably, these are issues that should be dealt with in EFL classrooms in Central Europe, the Balkans and elsewhere (Queiroz 2011). Yet the issues are so locally 'sensitive' that some teachers may hesitate to address them. 'Orientalism' in GI pedagogy can lead to stressing problems seen through a kind of Eurocentric prism, a 'recolonial' vantage (Dei 2010). Learning to see the prisms we see through is no easy task, as the quote from George Orwell at the beginning of this paper underscored.

On the situation of Roma across Europe, here a useful short article: <http://bit.ly/HkUcep>, and a video from Sofia by presstv on the situation of Roma there: <http://bit.ly/xHqsPt> It is eye-opening and can lead students to a difficult but necessary discussion. The Bulgarian media remain heavily biased: "Coverage by Bulgarian newspapers of Roma people is overwhelmingly negative, generally portraying them as robbers, rapists and murderers, according to a study by the Sofia-based Institute of Modern Politics. [...] The study shows that the least covered topics were the social and living problems of Roma. Four per cent of the articles related to programmes for the integration of ethnic minorities and the Roma culture was covered in three per cent of them" (<http://bit.ly/HVabeI>). In Serbia, many live in "abject poverty in illegal settlements, lacking basic infrastructure such as plumbing and electricity. Roma face problems in accessing the healthcare system and education and even media shows lack of interest in their issues. They are viewed as others and treated as lower class" (<http://bit.ly/HXFJ1G>). A number of Roma in Serbia are stateless, totally disenfranchised. Their situation in Macedonia also bleak: <http://bit.ly/IriD95>

Brainwashed by the corporate media

Students can discuss how the corporate media shape and distort our view of the world, a theme at the beginning of the "Get Loud" video mentioned earlier. Presstv is an Iranian media enterprise that often gives a different view of events, much more critical than BBC or CNN. Use presstv (<http://www.presstv.ir>) and Russian TV in English, International Service (<http://rt.com>) in the classroom for an often fresh critical perspective, perhaps combined with material from Democracy Now! (<http://www.democracynow.org>) and article from <http://www.countercurrents.org>..

GI in simpler English

Along with the unit in *Global* on world population, compare a similar short text in simpler Special English at Voice of America: <http://tinyurl.com/7cn6eqo> . The Special English archives online have many easy articles on aspects of GI (Templer 2011), take a look. More generally, the entire question of critical materials on Global Issues in simpler English remains a central problem. Only four of the 45 activity units in Sampedro/Hillyard (2004) are marked as 'elementary,' about 23% as 'pre-intermediate'. Eight of 32 units in Pavlíčková/Thomas (2008) are slotted as 'pre-intermediate,' none as 'elementary.' An imperative in GI pedagogy is far more material is needed at CEF levels A1/A2. Some of this is available at 'Global Issues for Learners of English,' a site run for a time by the *New Internationalist* and still accessible, although discontinued: <http://tinyurl.com/btf9d6t> . Materials from this site are utilized in Templer & Tonawanik (2010). The site is worth reviving, perhaps a task for GISIG. A major document in simpler English is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Plain Language Version): <http://tinyurl.com/d7g6sfr> . People in GISIG are now discussing how this initiative of Global Issues in simpler English based on articles from the *New Internationalist* could be revived.

The *New York Times* has started a new paper, *TIMES IN PLAIN ENGLISH*: <http://bit.ly/HELhAb> It is definitely much simpler English, with articles rewritten from the *NYT*, *Wall Street Journal* and other U.S. papers, and downshifted to lower-intermediate B1 level. This can be used like VOA Special English, for recreational and extensive reading at easier levels. Lots of the articles deal with issues of interest, political, economic, social. Research is needed on this new cost-free online resource, high-quality mainstream journalism rewritten and downshifted to plainer, simpler English.

Interior monologuing as a tool

The ‘interior monologue’ is a powerful tool for sharpening students’ social imagination, as they attempt in imagination to enter the minds and hearts of others, either from fiction or reality, and to deepen their sense of empathy with those imagined individuals in their situation. The monologue written (and/or spoken) by the learner can take a variety of forms: a poem by or about the person, a personal letter by her or him, a song text, a diary entry. Many activity units in Sampedro/Hillyard (2004) and Pavlíčková/Thomas (2008) include such monologuing as a way for learners to hone their social imagination, and any brief introduction to Global Issues pedagogy should stress that approach (Templer & Tonawanik 2010).

Young adult graphic novels

Another type of material worth experimenting with from the beginning, especially with intermediate learners and above, is young adult fiction, particularly graphic novels that deal with key issues relevant to young adults. Author Sherman Alexie (2011), a Native American, recently commented: “I write books for teenagers because I vividly remember what it felt like to be a teen facing everyday and epic dangers. ...] I write to give them weapons—in the form of words and ideas—that will help them fight their monsters. I write in blood because I remember what it felt like to bleed.” His novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) is a striking example of a YA graphic narrative ‘written in blood,’ and has stirred huge interest among teen readers in the U.S. and beyond. It could be experimented with in introducing GI and the issues of social justice, social exclusion, racism and growing up as an ‘Other.’ Graphic novels dealing with social problems have a place early on in global issues ELT pedagogy and need exploration, concrete research (Templer 2009). I have experimented with one classic autobiographic tale dealing with rape and teenage motherhood, Arnoldi (1998); all students found it a fascinating read. Much praised is Josh Neufeld’s *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge* (Pantheon 2009), a graphic ‘faction’ woven of seven true survival stories in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

OCCUPY worldwide

Inspired in part by the uprisings across the Arab world, Greece and the ‘indignants’ in Spain, people from all walks in the United States and Western Europe have been demonstrating against the power of Big Money in the advanced industrial countries and calling for fundamental change. They are in fact coming together to “denounce and announce” and to challenge power structures in their own societies, and the ideology of profit over people and how it impacts on their own lives. Occupying public spaces with a sense of “We can and will change the world.” A good web source for the movement: <http://tinyurl.com/6a34ndx> . Here another: <http://www.occupytogether.org> This protest movement is unprecedented, and deserves to be foregrounded in any introduction to GI. Roy (2011b) is a powerful interview by a key Indian activist; here a ‘vision statement’

from the populist OWS movement: <http://tinyurl.com/c8xnbph> This movement clearly points to life beyond capitalism, 'another world is possible'. One slogan is: "It's time to reclaim our democracy," with massive training for non-violent direct action protest across the U.S. (<http://bit.ly/HrYSt8>). In a classic interview, Noam Chomsky (n.d.) discusses his views on social anarchism and the misunderstanding of what "libertarian socialism" means, and radical decentralist democracy as he sees it. Many in the Occupy movement would probably agree with Noam. His book (2012a) centers on Occupy from a more social libertarian perspective. There is considerable excitement stateside in response of OWS's call for a May 1 general strike and the anticipation of an American 'Spring of the 99%' inspired in part by the Arab uprisings 2011.

Another segment of the Occupy movement is a student uprising against their own huge debt as a result of attending expensive public universities (Ross 2011). In the UK, many students expect to be 40,000 pounds or more in debt by the time they finish their first degree, ditto in the U.S. A student insurgency is burgeoning around that, demanding cost-free higher education: <http://tinyurl.com/8496dl3> . In many countries, students from working-class and lower middle-class families are running up huge debts to study, and then find they cannot get a job. Youth unemployment is extreme across North Africa, in Spain, in Greece, in fact in most countries under the free-market system. Spain now has the highest jobless rate in the industrial world, 25%, with 52% of young adults jobless. Here in Bulgaria it is now 29% for the youth demographic. Overall joblessness was 11% in February 2012 the Eurozone, with a huge 20% in Spain and Greece. On 22 March 2012, a huge general strike was organized in Portugal to protest the choking hand of austerity: <http://bit.ly/H8PBK4> . A recent article discusses the huge uneven impact of austerity specifically on women in Canada: <http://bit.ly/IsrC83> . Also In Canada the student strike in Quebec in 2012 has been extraordinary. Here a detailed look and analysis: <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/622.php>

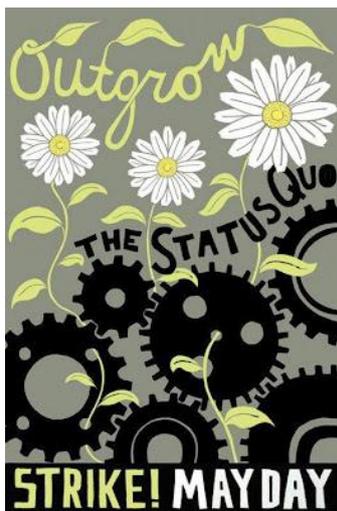
A new book by Ed Howker & Shiv Malik, *jilted generation: how Britain has bankrupted its youth* (2010). It deals with the many problems of the generation born after September 1979. "Jilted" here means "cheated," after having been promised a better life a generation that finds itself struggling to find even minimal employment. As it states: "Things go wrong in society all the time, but rarely do they go wrong for an entire generation" (blurb). Recent statistics in Bulgaria indicate that 57% of younger people are not working in job that match their professional skills and education, while many others are jobless, or have emigrated. Chomsky (2012b) describes the mounting public assault on education in the United States. Exploring education at the current critical juncture in the world System should be integral to a 'critical CLIL.'

SPUSA statement on education and foreign policy 2012 / PSL

The Socialist Party USA has a strong statement on how to transform education in its 2012 election manifesto: <http://bit.ly/HMQw0h> . Students might also find other interesting material on the SPUSA website. This is the oldest radical left party in the United States, going back to the political work of Marxist Eugene Debs, more than a century ago. Among its many activists and supporters were writer Upton Sinclair, Helen Keller and Albert Einstein. The SPUSA is multi-tendency, so that progressive Americans from many different political viewpoints, including social anarchism, can find a place there. The 2012 election statement on foreign policy calls for an end to all U.S. military bases abroad, an end to U.S. participation in NATO, cutting the U.S. military spending budget by 50%, and other radical policy shifts designed to "stem the rising tide of the Military Industrial

Complex. This will free up vital tax dollars for social services while also making it possible to combat the culture of militarism that has grown strong in the US.” It also calls for the need to “immediately end all international military, police, and security assistance and training programs, especially funding to Israel, Egypt and Colombia;” and to dismantle the CIA: <http://bit.ly/H9NLde> The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) is a strong Marxist party in the U.S., here a video “Seize the Banks”: <http://bit.ly/IKabjI> . They have incisive analyses of many local and global issues: <http://www.pslweb.org> here their 10-point program for the 2012 elections: <http://bit.ly/IxHkzs>

May Day



<<http://bit.ly/JYOUIV>>

Days in the calendar like May Day are also useful to highlight Global Issues. May Day 2012 in the U.S. and many other countries saw a significant outpouring of protest and solidarity among ordinary people, workers and students. What was May Day like where you teach? In Eastern Europe, it has changed significantly since the old days of state socialism. But given the general implosion of the current system, it is being revitalized in new ways. See this statement from the SPUSA: <http://bit.ly/Jn3gta> It speaks about the importance of ‘horizontalism’ (local action of simple people) in effecting social change, not under central orders by a small group directed from above.

Struggle in Palestine

Speaking of Israel, a courageous ‘get loud’ movement *against occupation* that I think should be highlighted in Global Issues looking at politics in the Middle East is active among Palestinian youth on the West Bank. Here a video of resistance from Nabi Saleh village on 9 Dec. 2011, where a young Palestinian demonstrator was killed (point 6:30 min. in video) by a teargas canister fired to his head: <http://tinyurl.com/c6mt4ta> There are many videos on Youtube dealing with the West Bank struggle that could be shown to students. Ask them to imagine they are among the demonstrators, or among the Israeli soldiers. How do they feel? How would they react? Presstv recently did a recent report centering on Palestinian demands that a road be opened to Palestinians, it is segregated and only Jewish Israelis can use it, while the village is cut off: <http://bit.ly/H9fQ1A> A good site for students on Palestine is <http://www.imemc.org> . Much material there for browsing, discussing.

Rethinking GI in Central and Eastern Europe

A difficult and sensitive issue inside GI pedagogy in the former 'state-socialist' countries has, I feel, to be broached. How are the 'free market economies' and 'democratic' parliaments that have replaced the former state socialist system – and the frequent stress to make ends meet inherent for many in this new System – actually seen by learners? Especially when compared with realities of state socialism as their parents experienced them? Horvath & Štiks (2012), writing on the 'desert of the Transition' in the post-socialist Balkans, note:

the very concept of Transition—as an ideological construct of domination based on the narrative of integration of the former socialist Europe into the Western core—actually hides the monumental neo-colonial transformation of this region into a dependent semi-periphery. The adjunct concepts of “weak state” or “failed state,” for example, paper over the fact that these are not anomalies of the Transition, but rather are one of its main products.[...] Why do people feel politically disempowered and economically robbed and enslaved today?

I am in close contact with a demographic born in Bulgaria around 1970, individuals who grew up in the life worlds under Soviet-style socialism that existed here until 1990. And often surprisingly, they are certain everyday life was much better for them and their families than life today. This demographic includes experienced teachers in the schools who think that social relations and well-being, human dignity, health care, cultural literacy, and much more – were far superior in the socialist Bulgaria they grew up in than the System today. This is not simply “communist nostalgia” (Horvath & Štiks (2012)). According to a recent poll, Fifty-six per cent of Bulgaria's doctors want to leave the country to work abroad, while one in eight is considering a change of profession, a health system in profound extended crisis (<http://bit.ly/Hb1G3m>). Unemployment and poverty were unknown in the 1970s/80s. Intriguingly, people say the quality of many products, from food to clothing to construction, was much better, watched over by enforced adherence to the Bulgarian State Standard (БДС) for all products, not the 'counterfeit' kinds of sausages, yoghurt, wine, etc. available now from private companies in many Bulgarian shops.. Teachers agree that schools were better under the old system, reading culture was more solid, books super-cheap. Academic standards were demonstrably higher, classroom discipline far more strict. Universities were cost-free, curricula rigorous. Neighborhoods were kept clean by the institution of the *uborka*. In any event, when teaching Global Issues in Eastern Europe, the question of how learners view the not-so-distant different past is worth examining with an open mind & heart. Indeed, everything touched on in this article calls out for collaborative classroom action research, and new avenues for turning talk to walk.

One compelling answer hands-on to the planetary crisis: *Transition Towns*

One growing and very exciting movement is *Transition Towns*, which started in the UK and is now spreading to many large and small towns across several continents. It is about taking innovative steps to create a more locally-based life style, structures of lower energy consumption, local agriculture, revitalizing of local community, and much more. Against the commodification of our lives (Leys & Harriss-White, 2012). It is very much community-led, focusing on local empowerment, and is a good project to introduce to students because many young people are involved, in many different ways. Simpler living makes simple sense. Its website is <http://www.transitionnetwork.org> .Part of transition is the development of local currency. In Greece in the current crisis this is spreading, as in Volos, where people have introduced the TEM as a town currency <http://bit.ly/I79H6n>

Local currencies also exist in a number of U.S. towns. Watch this video “What is Transition all about?” (<http://bit.ly/HNBaaK>). One speaker describes Transition Towns succinctly: “How can we best live in a way that is sustainable? It is a community-led response to some of the greatest crises of our time.” Another says: “We’re gonna have to change just about every aspect of life, just about every system that we depend on for our lives. For everything from food to clothing to transport, just about everything. We’re gonna have to change every single system radically, in a very short period of time.” Here an interview with Rob Hopkins: “It’s about designing a process at a key tipping point in civilization”: <http://bit.ly/H5V1Tz> . Show these videos to your students, discuss with them and with friends. It just might change your life. In some ways Transition is about an oxymoron in human progress: *a radically inventive ‘back to the future’ if we are to survive.*

Note: all URLs in this paper accessed 3 May 2012.

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