

Learning to Be a Global Citizen

By Wendy Terry

In Canada, citizenship is rarely a concept we think we need to learn about. We either take it for granted as we grow up, or as newcomers, we take a short course to pass the citizenship test. Born in Canada, I had not thought much about what it means to be a citizen until I was working with newcomers, both refugees and immigrants, doing job resettlement counselling. Then it became clear to me that being a citizen today includes the right to work, the right to a minimum amount of economic security and the right to a feeling of belong somewhere.

Later reading Michael Mann's books on *The Sources of Social Power*, I was fascinated by the chapters describing how the modern concept of citizenship developed from the seventeenth century to the present. Imagine what a leap in human awareness it was to move from being a serf to being a citizen with rights. The road to equality began with this idea of liberty. Then in the nineteenth century came the idea of political freedom. Finally in the twentieth century came the right to social and economic security

As people moved from feudal relationships to citizenship in a nation state, popular general education campaigns proliferated. Mann describes the coffee house learning culture that contributed to the development of the concept of citizenship in the 1800's. In fact, adult education in the first half of the 1900's in Canada was referred to as citizenship education not training which is what adult education is today.

Now we are trained primarily to be competitive workers in the global employment market; however, we need learn to be global citizens too, just as the new citizens of the nineteenth century had to learn how to be citizens of a nation state.

Today the concept of citizenship is so much a part of our culture we are hardly conscious for it. Yet the concept of citizenship is undergoing profound change as we become global citizens as well as citizens of our country. What is involved in this process? Where do we learn to become global citizens?

With these questions in mind, I delved into a book called *Globalization and Migration, Globalization and The Politics of Being* by Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson and into a stack of Continuing Education Calendars.

Castles and Davidson note that the group of people called a nation occupy a particular geographical territory and have a common cultural and ethnic background. One of the ways we become citizens of a nation is by learning our national history according to certain agreed upon myths disseminated through government and the educational system.

Castles and Davidson note the myth of a homogeneous national culture. Every nation state has been made up of a number of ethnic groups, languages, traditions and histories, never more so than in North America. Adult education defined as citizenship in the first half of the 1900's can be seen as a part of the national cultural homogenizing process, helping newcomers to become Canadians or Americans. Today we accept the multicultural nature of society and watch supranational structures like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the International Court of Justice gain more and more power over our lives and our nation.

I wondered where I would take courses on becoming a global citizen. Well, accessible general education courses, that is, affordable, available, non-credit, on this subject are scarce. However, here is my recommended Continuing Education Program of Global Citizenship made up of courses from a variety of institutions.

In the Ryerson Continuing Education Calendar under the subject area of Liberal Studies were some introductory courses: *The Globalization of World Politics* would give one a good overview of the supranational structures, which are shaping world politics today. Several courses on the history or philosophy of world cultures seemed interesting. They included *The History of the Caribbean*, *Hindu Philosophy and Ethics of Modernity*, and *East meets West: Asia in International Relations*. The Ryerson courses are credit ones but ones at the U. of T can be taken just for interest.

In the School of Continuing Education calendar for the University of Toronto under the subject area *Arts, Humanities, Science, and Creative Writing* I found a number of courses: *Globalization and What it*

Will Mean for You would give one a good sociological slant on how we are creating a global village. Another course **Culture: Seeing Through the Eyes of Another** would be a good complement to the first course on the global village. Courses on other cultures included: **Demystifying Chinese Culture and Society**, and **Shahs, Sultans and Sheiks** which offers an historical perspective on the Middle Eastern experience would be topical. In this calendar, I found courses on **African-American Literature** and **Caribbean Literature**.

There were quite a number of courses on the spirituality of other cultures including several comparative courses. These included: **World Faiths, World Faiths-Eastern Traditions, Great Philosophies of India: Hinduism and Buddhism, Great Philosophies of China, and Japan: Buddhism and Beyond**.

College offerings were for credit and so would entail assignments and exams. But a survey in the subject areas of General Education or Liberal Arts identified these courses: at **George Brown College, Native Peoples and Canadian Society**; at **Centennial College, Canadian Studies** perhaps of interest to newcomers; at **Seneca College, What in the World is Going On**, a course on international news stories; **Contemporary Asian Literature, Canadian Identities** through a study of literature, **Canadian Cultural Mosaic** a sociological study; at **Humber College, Global Issues, the Sociology of Cultural Differences**, and my favourite **Power 1**, not specifically about supranational structures, but about the power underlying any government structure old or new, national or international.

Why not make Global Citizenship part of your Continuing Education plan this year.

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