

**‘Global Connections in Action’**  
**Presentation given by**  
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**Global Connections IX Seminar**  
**Antigua, Guatemala**

Madame la co-fondatrice de Global Connections, Isobel Pelham, Monsieur le Président, Malcolm McKenzie, Madame la directrice exécutive, Claudia Gallant et mes très chers amis, un grand et très chaleureux bonjour.

It is truly a pleasure to be here with you in Guatemala and please allow me to say to Scott and to all of his staff, merci, merci beaucoup, vous êtes formidables! The pre-seminar trip was a wonderful and essential introduction to this beautiful country and its people.

As I considered how to formulate the title of my presentation, I wrestled with the words central to this seminar’s theme: multiculturalism, inter- , cross-, or even trans-cultural education, or education for cosmopolitanism. Finally, and in light of what has transpired these past two days, I have settled on the following:

**‘Global Connections in Action’**

Before sharing the main body of my presentation with you, however, I would like to set my introductory remarks against recent events in France.

Asked to vote on the European constitution, a significant majority of the French electorate said ‘No’ to this latest step in the most ambitious project of multicultural integration presently underway. This has created a period of doubt and uncertainty in the country and many, both in and out of government, wonder how this could have come to pass. France is, after all, one of the founding countries of the European project and its former president, Giscard d’Estaing, presided over the constitution’s elaboration. Against a background of caricature, however, which included, for example, the invasion of the country by Polish plumbers or Romanian violinists, and of fear, the arrival of Turkey into the European Union, the electorate turned its

back for the first time on a future it had so patiently and progressively constructed for more than 40 years.

From my perspective, that of an educator and long-time observer of French life, one possible reason for this failure, apart from being an expression of outright discontent with the present government, came to mind: the way the nation's schools had long taught its students about Europe. As I inquired into this in my school, many colleagues patiently showed me the chapters in the civics, history and geography books that were devoted to Europe and to its integration. They assured me that students were able to gain a good understanding and knowledge of Europe and of the Union.

Nonetheless, it seemed clear to me that it was not enough to study or to learn about Europe. Understanding something intellectually, gaining knowledge about it, becoming informed, is really only the beginning; we must also become aware of what it means to others as well as to ourselves, so that it somehow vibrates within us physically and emotionally. In other words, if we truly believe that something is important, we must do everything we can to create the conditions that allow our students to live it. This can only be done in the real world, beyond the classroom, through personal exploration, experience, and engagement.

But how? What form of experiential learning could this take?

One answer to this might be through service.

If we truly believe that it is important for people from different horizons to understand each other in order to live together in peace and to promote the welfare of all, then service may provide for multiculturalism and intercultural understanding what it is said to provide for internationalism and that is, to quote Malcolm, a bedrock.

I call it 'multiculturalism in action'. I think Peter would have called it 'Global Connections in action'.

During the closing days of the Global Connections seminar that I had the privilege to host in Maisons-Laffitte back in the summer of 2003, Peter spoke to me of the importance of creating an international service project. Indeed, he envisioned one in French-speaking Africa and with

a Canadian school as partner. I'm pretty sure Peter knew that service was not an aspect of French education but he strongly believed and was aware that everyone, even the French, could benefit from experiential learning.

As for me, I thought that once again, a 'Peter Pelham challenge' was just too good to pass up! But it wasn't just that: Peter knew in his heart what it might take to transform a community. He seemed to have an uncanny ability to engage you at exactly the right moment. And that's how it was for us at Ermitage where we had been struggling to introduce service into our community for some time.

That fall, I returned to school intent on developing an international service learning project that would combine service and international awareness and link into our curriculum. To this end, during the opening weeks of the school year, along with a colleague, we created a vehicle for this initiative in the form of a student club named 'Acting on Global Issues'.

And it was then that chance took a hand in our affairs. In October of 2003, at a meeting of our parents' association, I was approached by a woman who had recently arrived with her family from Mumbai. There, she had come to know and help a man named Pierre Péan who had established a foundation, the Franco-Indian Schools of Bombay, to help children in the slum of Malad, located in a northern suburb of Mumbai. As this unusual gentleman was planning a visit to France, she wondered if I would be interested in inviting him to speak to some students.

This unexpected offer was just what was needed to focus the interest of the small group of students who were interested in acting on global issues. At the following meeting it was agreed that Mr. Péan would be invited to speak to the club.

Monsieur Péan, a young man of 75 years, consequently arrived among us and recounted how, following his retirement from life as a travel agent, he had gone to Bombay, India, where he created a simple school house to help educate the very poor children of the slum. He patiently explained how, after the slum had been bulldozed by the municipal authorities, and his school building along with it, he had found an old school bus to house his work and had parked it just at one of the entrances to the slum.

The students were quickly convinced that it was important to raise money to support his work. At a later meeting, the club's president, a senior named Julia Buren, declared that it simply wasn't enough to send a check: a group of students should go there and work alongside Mr. Péan. The club therefore set itself three goals: to inform the school community on issues relating to poverty and inequality; to raise money for the Association of Franco-Indian Schools of Bombay; and, finally, to send a group of students to India.

We set out to make this happen. Through our clubs in the middle school, efforts were undertaken to organise fundraising throughout the school. At the same time, students learned about Pierre Péan's work and had opportunities to discuss it in our middle school forums, or 'Placitum' meetings. With our help, the students organised a series of very successful events: a crazy dress night, a talent show featuring traditional Indian dances, our first international night of rock, sponsored runs for the lower and middle schools, an Indian cuisine buffet for the middle school... all in all, they raised \$20,000!

In April 2004, I travelled to Mumbai with my colleague, Pascal Bouquillard, our school's Round Square coordinator, to establish for myself whether or not it was feasible to send a group of students to work alongside Pierre Péan in the slums of Malad. I also wanted to establish a partnership with a school there that could serve as a link and stepping stone into broader aspects of life in that burgeoning city.

Searching for a possible partner, I wrote to Peter who reminded me that Hugh Pullan, head of the upper school at the Dhirubhai Ambani International School, had attended Global Connections 7! It was ever so small a world in Peter's eyes!

In the course of my April visit, Hugh welcomed me to what was at the time a brand-new school and introduced me to his CAS coordinator, Shaun McInerny. After meeting Pierre Péan, Shaun wasted little time in getting his students involved and they proceeded to set up a service project to make rubber sandals for the children of Malad. Most importantly, the Dhirubhai Ambani International School accepted to be our educational partner and to help us by hosting our students on several mornings.

Upon our return that April, we were able to offer our students the possibility of participating in an international service learning project. Dubbed 'Gateway to India', the 10-day program was built around three parts: culture and discovery, education and exchange, service and learning.

And so it was that six months later, during our October break, I led a group of 11 students and two colleagues, Sophie Lenoir, head of the lower school, and Geneviève Terzian, a primary school teacher, on our first international service project to Mumbai. In order to share this experience with our school community, we decided to engage the services of two professional film makers, Yann Gentric and Mathieu Mondrieux.

This project has had a very significant and long lasting impact on our school's community and beyond. In the months that followed our return, the students who had been to India enthusiastically recounted their experience to all of our students and to those of two other schools as well. They spent two afternoons at the Lycée International in nearby Saint Germain and then flew down to Nice to do the same at the Centre International de Valbonne. Today, we look forward to hosting a group of students from the Ambani School next October and to returning to Mumbai in February 2006 with a new service project that will include students and teachers from both Saint Germain and Valbonne. And as I speak, Geneviève Terzian, along with another primary school colleague, has returned to Mumbai to train Pierre Péan's teachers.

As others before us, we have seen for ourselves the power of service to transform the lives of our students and beyond that, of our school. But this personal transformation is only part of the story: for our students to become truly involved global citizens, beyond learning about our multicultural world, they need to experience it.

By becoming first informed and then genuinely aware of what is happening elsewhere in our global community, they may become responsible for a small part of the future of our planet.

And what of the Peter Pelham challenge? I think it is clear to all gathered here today that Peter's quest to question us, to push us, to compel us to action, lives on.

As part of the work of reflection undertaken by all of us who participated in the 'Gateway to India' project, I wrote my own recollections of the journey. I invite you to read them if you wish and you may find a copy of my 'Bombay Musings' here at the front of the room.

The documentary film which you are about to see, 'From the other side of the mirror', is the work of the two young Frenchmen who accompanied us on that trip to India. It tells the story of those young people who went to Mumbai to help Pierre Péan and who, on the way, discovered themselves.

Thank you and I hope you will enjoy the film.