

THE WUHAN DECLARATION ON TEACHING AND LEARNING STYLES: CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN THE CLASSROOM

14 April 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Wuhan Global Connections VI Seminar was called to affirm the need for schools to be creative and innovative in the classroom. Global Connections recognizes the need for schools to teach children as individuals and to respond to their individual needs. Global Connections also recognizes that we cannot go on teaching for the past because the rate of change in our global community requires the development of new skills to cope with rapid change. By turning our classrooms into creative and innovative centers, schools will ensure the development of those skills needed in the search for meaning and purpose in our lives.

PREAMBLE

- We, principals of schools worldwide and delegates of the sixth seminar of Global Connections, gathered at Wuhan in China to explore ways we can improve what we do to help every child in our schools grow into a creative person and a productive citizen of the world.
- In what was a meeting of East and West, we adopted as the over-arching metaphor to inform our discussions the T'ai Chi image of the horse rider whose trunk, while fixed to the horse, remains free above to move at will. For us it affirmed the need to root children in the fundamental substance of education in order to free them to be flexible, creative, and innovative.
- We drew a distinction between "creativity" and "innovation." We saw "creativity" as an attitude to life and not exclusive to the gifted, the practice of pushing boundaries: seeing and listening in ways we have not seen and listened before. "Innovation," we believe, brings into relationship that which has not previously been related.
- We traveled on the Yangtze River and experienced for ourselves the mammoth act of innovation at the Three Gorges Dam, which holds such promise for millions but which carries with it enormous cost to displaced citizens and to a stunningly beautiful landscape. This project became for us the embodiment of the risks and rewards inherent in creativity and innovation.
- We shared practical examples of creativity and innovation in our schools, including the "Graduation Portfolio" of Maryknoll School in Honolulu; the "Pathways of Discovery" project at L'Ermitage School in Paris; the information communications technology (ICT) innovations of King Edward VII School in England; the impressive range of student and school theme projects of Romania's Ion Luca Caragiale National College.
- We discovered more convergence than we anticipated. We were able to confirm that a culture of creativity and innovation has a positive impact on both teachers and learners and can serve as a catalyst for world change.

GIVENS

- Change is ongoing and all embracing
- Certain boundaries in the education field are fixed examinations, curricular requirements, national assessments, and university exam preparation (for examples)
- ICT is increasingly available and where it is available it should be put to optimal, creative and inclusive use. This will require strategies for education and training in schools for teachers and students.
- There are ever-widening inequities in the distribution of opportunities and resources in the developed and undeveloped populations of the world.
- Cultural diversity of the global society in which we live is to be honored and celebrated.

- Most schools are striving to meet two levels of need: those of nation and economy which require the acquisition of academic and vocational skills, and those which cultivate and encourage the growth of individual personality which require the acquisition of life skills.

THE PROCESS

The experiential nature of the Wuhan encounter brought about a major shift in positions and behaviors in all the delegates. The culturally diverse composition of the delegates; the need to accommodate each other's different ways of learning and understanding; the sharing of meals; the patience needed when conversing in more than one language; listening to one another and being playful together -- it all released an energy that resulted in shifted positions and understandings.

These made possible the consensus behind a declaration shaped against a backdrop of the breath-taking beauty and grandeur of the Yangtze's gorges, the enormity of the Three Gorges Dam project, and, most importantly of all, the courageous leadership in Principal Li Shuisheng's hosting Global Connections VI Seminar, the help of an indefatigable staff and the warm welcome of intelligent and cheerful students at The No. 1 Middle School attached to the Central China Normal University, the Guang Gu School, and Hubei Hua Yi Boarding School.

THE DECLARATION

We asked ourselves what all schools, irrespective of the availability of resources, should consider to be the most important factors in successfully developing independent, integrated and inquiring students, and came to the following statement.

We principals and educators attending Global Connections VI Seminar accept the challenge to encourage, support, and promote cultures of creativity and innovation in our schools in which:

- It is understood and accepted that teaching and learning are about relationships.
- It is understood and accepted that children already have their own knowledge, and that it is the teacher's role to assess what is already known and to decide how to build creatively on that foundation. Students can become, in turn, creative and innovative in their personal search for meaning.
- The teacher accepts the challenge to find the key to learning in each child and to be the classroom facilitator of that learning.
- Teachers work in various conditions with class groups of more than 50 students to individual mentoring all the while trying to respond to the individual learning styles of those students.
- The principal accepts the responsibility to create a school environment in which the teachers enjoy the support of the school's leader, and are allowed to take risks while innovating, to be courageous, and to see what they have not seen before.
- The principal takes bold steps to create the time, space, and processes for reflection and for the faculty's professional learning.
- The principal demonstrates support for passionate teachers and learners by being a passionate teacher and learner her/himself.
- The principal realizes the importance of teacher workshops and exchanges --- direct contact between teachers from around the world --- as the most effective way of exchanging ideas and experience across cultures.
- Schools celebrate and honor creativity and innovation purposefully and consciously. Schools and all adults who support their work affirm the centrality of the child in all they do. Schools honor the natural curiosity of children, who learn by playing and doing; they recognize the limitless imagination of students, which is balanced by their desire for relevance. Schools are enlivened by the enthusiasms and energy of students that ignite not only their own passions, but also those of the adults around them.

- The Global Connections network, which offers rewarding opportunities for teacher and student exchanges, and for influencing the future of education, will become part of principals' strategic planning in the worldwide development of schools as catalysts for cross-cultural understanding and goodwill. We principals are called, by this seminar, to hold up a mirror to the inner life that shapes leadership qualities; we meanwhile acknowledge the importance of such quiet reflection informing practical action. We undertake to report at the next Global Connections seminar on the measures we will have taken to promote a culture of creativity and innovation in our schools.