

A Battle of Metaphors: Is Globalization a ‘Rising Tide that Lifts All Boats’ or ‘a Race to the Bottom’?

Using Metaphors to Understand Ciudad Juarez/El Paso
Transnationalism

A Curriculum Module

Developed by the University of Illinois’ Center for Global Studies and Illinois
International High School Initiative for the PAWAC Annual Conference

“Mexico and the United States: More than Neighbors”

February 17-18, 2006



Center for Global Studies
A NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Ming-Hsuan Wu is a Master of Education student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught English in her home country, Taiwan, for four years and worked as a volunteer in Panama as a Chinese language instructor for a year. She enjoys doing community work in her free time and views it as a way to connect with people on daily basis. Her research interest is the involvement of NGOs in emancipatory women's literacy programs. Ming currently is a research assistant working with the Illinois International High School Initiative.

Jason Sparks is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has been an English teacher for roughly 15 years in a variety of settings, including an alternative high school for pregnant teenagers, a Navaho Reservation junior-high school, a Korean university, and a public high school in North Carolina. He is currently doing research on issues of globalization and educational policy shifts in the Asia-Pacific region with a focus on English language teacher education policy in Vietnam. Jason currently is a research assistant working with the Illinois International High School Initiative and UIUC's Global Studies in Education Online.

The **Illinois International High School Initiative** was established as a statewide program with a focus on the international dimension of teaching, learning, and community engagement in the secondary schools. IIHSI is a pioneering effort in the nation to deal with the challenges of our increasingly dynamic and complex world by providing Illinois teachers and students with opportunities and resources to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences in international education. Please visit our website (<http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/ihs/index.php>) for contact and other information.

The **Center for Global Studies** works closely with UIUC's nine colleges, multiple disciplinary and professional units, and faculty and students to globalize the research, teaching, and engagement missions of the university. CGS works to make the knowledge and teaching programs on all aspects of globalization available to teachers and students in Illinois and elsewhere around the country from K-16. These resources are also accessible to business, professionals, media, governmental agencies, civic organizations, and all members of the interested public concerned with global problems and how to solve them for the benefit of the American people - and peoples everywhere. Please visit our website (<http://www.cgs.uiuc.edu:16080/index.html>) for contact and other information.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Goals of this Curriculum Module

Section 1: What do we mean by a ‘Global Perspective’?

(And why might we need one?)

Section 2: A ‘battle of metaphors’: Is the global economy ‘a race to the bottom’ or ‘a rising tide that lifts all boats’?

Section 3: Much “more than Neighbors”:

Ciudad Juarez, El Paso & Globalization

Two Issues:

1. When water meets the desert
2. The economic divide: Maquiladoras, Migration & Labor

Rights

Section 4: Readings, resources & references

- Illinois State Board of Education Standards
- Suggested Border Studies readings
- Extending the Research

INTRODUCTION

“This is a place where two cities breathe the same air, drink the same water, and share the same destiny along . . . a ‘seamless border.’”ⁱ

Overview

This curriculum module was developed for the February 17-18, 2006 Peoria Area World Affairs Council conference, “Mexico and the United States: More than Neighbors.” Although specifically addressing the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso border region of the United States and Mexico, this module seeks more generally to explore the ways global forces are transforming social, political, and economic realities all around the world, including the United States. In this endeavor, we view the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso region as a profound example of how Mexico and the United States are indeed “more than neighbors”; this region presents a variety of issues, ranging from citizenship, economy, the environment and human rights that transcend national borders and are truly *transnational* in nature. These issues, while manifest in this particular region, are actually part of a larger, global set of trends, forces and processes. To understand the transnational nature of the challenges and opportunities facing the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso region is to begin to understand how globalization is increasingly affecting our lives in many fundamental ways

Methodology

We have developed a theme--*A Battle of Metaphors: Is the global economy a ‘rising tide that lifts all boats’ or a ‘race to the bottom’?*--and we use this as a framework to consider specific issues of the global economy and the transnational metropolitan region of Ciudad Juarez/El Paso, issues for which we have assembled a range of readings, some resources, and a few examples of classroom activities. The “battle” framework is based on two perspectives that emerged again and again in our research: a relatively pro-global-economy, ‘rising tide lifts all boats’ view arguing that the globalization of national economies benefits nations and those living within them economically and socially; and

a more critical, 'race to the bottom' perspective arguing that the increasing globalization of the economy allows transnational, deterritorialized investment capital to exploit a global division of labor that is actually increasing the gap between the rich and poor within and across nations. What both perspectives share is an understanding that these global processes are dramatically transforming the lived social reality of people and the environment in the areas where these economic activities take hold.

We developed this framework for two reasons: first, because these metaphors emerge explicitly and implicitly in the texts commonly found on these issues; and second, this ubiquity presented a wonderful opportunity to engage students in the process of consciously and critically engaging texts and discourses. *Texts*, in some linguistic approaches, are specific instances of use of a particular linguistic *genre* (everything from haiku poems to 'stop signs' to national constitutions). *Discourses* can be viewed as interpretable and recognizable patterns of thought and argument representing certain perspectives of the world (often ideology) which are structured in texts. A particular editorial column in the *Wall Street Journal*, on for example tax cuts, would be a specific text (the tax cut editorial) in a particular genre (all editorial columns), that would very likely reflect a certain discourse (the WSJ's traditional "low tax/small government" theme). In this analysis, the rising tide and race to the bottom discourses are considered to be constituted by a certain set of recognizable discursive features, and students will work directly with them.

We take as our premise that teachers would want students critically engaged with each text they encounter both inside and outside of the classroom, interpreting and critically analyzing the ways texts rhetorically assemble facts and perspectives.ⁱⁱ Metaphor can be powerful rhetoric, and in this unit, we will see that those promoting global capitalism take great pains to deploy the 'rising tide' imagery; similarly those criticizing global capitalism deploy the "race to the bottom" imagery to great effect. Students can easily come to understand the significance of the 'up/rising=good capitalism' and 'down/bottom=bad capitalism' discourses which are metaphorically structured in the texts they engage, whichever text genres they encounter (textbooks, TV interviews,

economic policy documents). In engaging the texts as texts, the genres as genres, and the discourses as discourses, students can consciously consider and control how texts are ‘working on them’; they can take responsibility for their own interpretations; and they can decide for themselves where they stand in relation to these complex and important issues. Such an approach, we believe, also opens up entirely new ways for teachers to develop lessons around the analysis of texts on this or any subject, substituting texts encountered in the world outside the classroomⁱⁱⁱ for textbooks, or even analyzing textbooks as texts representing a certain genre, constructed discursively to create certain effects.

Final thoughts . . .

We believe that teachers are busy, but also creative, and we hope that our methodology is clear enough to be suggestive of multiple ways of using our ‘battle of metaphors’ framework to develop classroom activities and for further teacher and student research into the issues. We hope teachers appreciate that our readings were chosen for their *accessibility* (both for being online and readable), for their *relevance* to the themes and topics, and for their ‘*authenticity*’ (discourses actually and commonly found in internet research: World Bank Group reports; NGO websites; online news-media outlets; Google Scholar articles). We have also indexed our module to Illinois State Student Learning Standards (see them in “Readings, Resources & References” below).

We thank both the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Center for Global Studies and the Joint Areas Centers of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for their support and resources. We are very grateful for the opportunity to work on this project given us by the Peoria World Affairs Council, and we hope we have succeeded in creating something teachers and students will find interesting and useful.

Everything below is intended for both students and teachers.

GOALS OF THIS CURRICULUM

- To understand what a Global Studies Perspective is and how it compares to an International or Nation-centric point of view;
- To consider the benefits of a Global Studies Perspective in researching the increasingly *transnational* interconnections and interdependencies transforming the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental reality of the world in general, and the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso region in particular;
- To understand how the transnational complexity of this border region reflects processes of globalization that link people in the region to each other and to people around the world, whether we live in Illinois or in India;
- To consider multiple perspectives on the Global Economy, as well as the way these perspectives often are structured in recognizable discourses;
- To develop critical reading skills in students across multiple text genres;
- To facilitate critical research skills as students encounter issues of relevance, quality, and ideology in online-text-based research across a wide variety of text genres and perspectives.

REFERENCES AND TEXT LINKS

ⁱ “Two Countries, One City,” Times Magazine. Retrieved on February 12, 2006, from <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101010611/fcities.html>. This is a great Time.com special report on the Juarez/El Paso region—a must-read!

ⁱⁱ Understandings and definitions of the notions of “discourse” and “text” are quite diverse in the field of linguistics. The use of the terms here is based in Norman Fairclough’s work in discourse analysis and social science research. The inclusion of these terms and concepts is not intended to add an element of academic ‘fanciness’ to this discussion; the authors believe that students can easily see the importance of understanding political, social and historical literature in much the same way we teach them to interpret and analyze poetry, short stories and other fiction in English classes. For example, good history teachers would certainly encourage students not to take at face value the content in history textbooks. A U. S. history textbook is a certain kind of text, one filled with easily recognizable discourses which present the world in certain ideological frames of reference. For example, a textbook may present the history of the Alamo conflicts from different perspectives: one might be overtly nationalistic; another more critical of U.S. aims and actions; and a third may adopt the tone of academic objectivity, yet exclude obvious and important facts and perspectives students need to decide for themselves what happened and why it is important. Thus, students can certainly see the importance of how a history book is a certain kind of *text*, one structured for certain social purposes, purposes it is their responsibility as citizens to

recognize and engage; similarly, students can certainly see the importance of how such a text is inevitably imbued with certain *discourses*, ones structured and deployed for certain social purposes, and again, ones students as citizens have the responsibility to critically engage. (Or such is the premise that undergirds our curriculum module.)

ⁱⁱⁱ A glorious compendium of real-world textual resources can be found on the Globalization Links page on David Held et al.'s Global Transformations website, <http://www.polity.co.uk/global/links.asp>. This should not be missed.