

Global Consumer Education: A Content Analysis of Project Real World

Adherence to the value of materialism and to an egocentric paradigm have prompted many to question our consumption decisions in light of their impact on the global village. If we are to teach students to respect the inherent human and consumer rights of all global citizens, our consumer economic curricula must embrace a global perspective. This paper discusses the results of a content analysis of Project Real World (PRW), a new consumer economics curriculum, from a global perspective (fulfillment of a practicum requirement for a 1993-94 Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) global education workshop).

Dr. Sue L.T. McGregor, Mount Saint Vincent University¹
Katherine Greenfield, Atlantic School of Theology²

What is a global perspective?

Succinctly, a global perspective consists "of the information, attitudes, awareness, and skills which taken together, can help individuals understand the world, how they affect others, and how others affect them" (Babich cited in Smith, 1993, p.19). Attention to world interdependence has been on the increase in education in general, and more recently, in home economics education. In 1989, Smith suggested that "global concepts are a part of home economics but their place in home economics curricula needs further defining" (p.112). To that end, Smith and Peterat (1992) published a valuable document that provides a comprehensive yet easy to use and understand conceptualization of what a global perspective means to home economics (14 guiding principles) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Dimensions of a global perspective

Perspective consciousness: we have view of the world that is not universally shared

State of the planet awareness: aware of prevailing and emerging world conditions and developments

Cross cultural awareness: there are a diversity of ideas and practices found in human societies

Knowledge of global dynamics: modest comprehension of key traits and mechanisms of the world system

Aware of human choices and consequences: aware of problems related to choices facing people and nations and

how these choices change as one gains an consciousness of global systems

Balanced development: demands should not strain local supply

Voluntary simplicity: creation of a lifestyle by streamlining and simplifying personal possessions

Technology comparable with local culture

International reciprocity: appreciate that each culture has much to give and much to gain from cross cultural interactions

Sustainable lifestyles: involves intricate balance of all influences operating within a culture

Systems consciousness: ability to think is a systems mode rather than a dualistic mode (cause/effect; problem/solution; local/global)

Involvement consciousness and preparedness: choices made and actions taken have repercussions for the global present and in the future

Process mindedness: learning and personal development are continuous journeys with no fixed or final destination

Responsible value deliberations and moral justifications for decisions: base consumer decisions on values as well as facts; make decisions on the basis of good reasons rather than force, self interest, fear, habit, customs

What is Project Real World?

Project Real World is a five module, activity based program designed to empower the Grade 10-12 student to cope with, question, manage and influence the multitude of changes in the macro environment impacting on the consumer in the marketplace. It was initiated in the fall of 1988 by a special Canadian Federal/Provincial Consumer Education and Plain Language Task Force. Subsequent to cooperative development between six Canadian provinces and extensive field testing, the curriculum was released in the summer of 1992³. It is a modular series covering the wide gamut of marketplace education topics and is based on Bannister and Monsma's (1982) well known classification system for consumer education concepts (known as Classi).

By way of a rationale, PRW argues that young people have an enormous amount of spending power in the complex Canadian marketplace; yet, their purchase decisions may be less than optimal if they have not been equipped with consumer education skills and processes, things they need to effectively discern the influence of the marketplace on their goals, values, needs and wants. The authors of PRW argue that students need to know how to make personal economic choices in the context of Canada's economy, and be skilled at the steps involved in reaching their personal and financial objectives and goals. It is this process of decision making that will remain timeless with individuals as they face a world of rapid change ("Federal/Provincial", 1992). The scope of the five modules includes:

Module 1. The Canadian Marketplace and You - globalization of the market, advancing technology, the environment, and the economic, social and political changes and the impact of these spheres of the macro environment on the consumer

Module 2. Your Economic Decisions - individual, the consumer decision process and factors which influence this decision process

Module 3. Resource Management Skills - individual financial planning and shopping skills

Module 4. Entrepreneurship and the World of Work - self assessment and the skills required to career plan, job find and venture into self-employment

Module 5. Citizen Participation - increasing student's awareness of rights and responsibilities, the consumer protection framework, complaint procedures and

assertiveness in the marketplace ("Federal/Provincial", 1992).

Methodology

PRW was analyzed by conducting a content analysis using a "code in use" approach to code words and phrases (Holsti, 1969; Miles & Huberman, 1984). A preliminary start list was created by drawing on a recent study which identified **nine trigger terms** that serve as indicators of global concepts (Cissell cited in Peterat, 1989): world, international, across cultures, other cultures, other nations, other geographical areas, developing countries, global and earth. Upon reading Peterat's analysis of her 1989 study in conjunction with the pilot coding procedure noted below, the authors added an additional 12 trigger words: interdependent world, worldwide, cultural values, cultural factors, other places/other ways, other life style patterns, global interdependence, global interest, global impact, think globally and global goals. The final coding instrument comprising twenty one trigger concepts and was organized using the eleven organizational components of the PRW modules.

Consensual reliability (92% congruence level) was achieved by double coding using two different people at two different times (Krippendorff, 1980; Lindkvist, 1981; Sepstrup, 1981). Since this level of coding reliability assures that the data collected from the documents adequately reflects the facts or reality (Andren, 1981), we coded two separate modules each rather than each coding all four modules (2 and 3 and 1 and 5).

Our analysis excluded the module on Entrepreneurship and the World of Work because we felt that job availability, job security and job satisfaction (resource generation) are important but peripheral variables relative to the core process of making consumer decisions (resource expenditure and management).

Results

When one relates PRW to the 14 principles or dimensions of a global perspective (see Table 1), it is clearly evident that PRW was not developed from the an ideology that embraces a global perspective. Six principles are evident in three of the modules (no evidence of global perspective in module five) but not from a global perspective: state of planet awareness (limited to conserving to save the environment); cross cultural awareness (only from traditional conception of global education); consequences of human choices (but not from a global perspective); systems consciousness

(but only in relation to domestic economy and not reciprocity); process mindedness (but not for global intent); and personal values (but not definable moral judgements).

Evidence of global perspective in specific modules

The strength of the argument for evidence of a global perspective in PRW depends on how it is operationalized. If one accepts that mention of any one of the 21 global trigger concepts constituted evidence of a global perspective, then we can say that a global interest was evident in 20 of the 39 conceptual areas and in three of the four modules (not citizen participation). If, however, a global interest is more rigorously operationalized as comprising multiple coding of multiple concepts, then a much smaller number of conceptual areas could be said to offer a global perspective (7 of the 39) and in only two modules:

Module 1 - The Canadian Marketplace and You

- The consumer and the economy
- Economic systems
- Political and social systems
- Government public policy, regulations, interest groups
- Society and the individual

Module 2 - Your economic decisions

- Adult roles, freedoms, choices and responsibilities
- Environment (conserving)

Furthermore, only two global concepts provided the bulk of the evidence: "other countries" and "cultural values". Given that blending the 21 global concepts with the 39 consumer economic conceptual areas could yield a powerful tool from which to teach global perspective to young students, this is a very narrow representation of a global perspective.

Although not included in this content analysis, future researchers attempting to determine the presence of a global perspective in written documents may want to code for the following concepts as well because they could be construed as conferring a global perspective to consumer economics: values; systems; morals, planet, quality of life; standard of living; environment; sustainability, diversity, stewardship, and community needs. Many of these concepts are reflected in the 14 principles related to a global perspective.

Components of the curriculum most likely to contain reference to global concepts

Evidence of a global perspective was limited to two components of the PRW curriculum: For the Teacher (n=32) and Procedures to implement the lesson (n=39). Just three concepts provided this evidence of a global perspective ("other countries", "world" and "earth") and only in the section dealing with the environment (module two).

Sometimes what is absent is more revealing than that which is present; curriculum components that did not include any global reference included "Purpose" and "Scope" (n=1) of the module. We feel that these would be appropriate sections in which to sensitize teachers/educators to the relevance of exposing students to a global perspective as regards consumption and resource management decisions.

Recommendations

Conclusion #1

PRW provides the foundation of sound consumer education advocated for by Classi: (a) consumer decision making in the marketplace; (b) resource management; and (c) citizen advocacy and participation in the marketplace. Unfortunately, we have to conclude that PRW falls short of bringing a global perspective to consumer education. It currently orients students to their activities in the Canadian market based economy but not to the consequences of their consumption decisions on citizens of other market or non-market based economics in the global/international marketplace.

Recommendation. One is reminded that PRW is based on Classi. It is encouraging that Lusby (1992) has recently modified and expanded Classi such that the new version introduces educators, marketers, and consumers to a more global perspective from which to consider consumer decisions and consumer education. Lusby contributes such concepts as consumer ethics, the ecosystem perspective, the cradle to grave product and service perspective, and the concept of local, domestic and global realms to the field of consumer education. She advocated a shift from a microscopic, micro-economic, personal perspective of consumer education to a holistic, macroscopic, global, ecologically responsible, humanitarian perspective; a paradigm shift from egocentric to ecocentric consumer decisions.⁴

Conclusion #2

There was absolutely no evidence of any global concepts in the module on Citizen Participation. This is a concern because citizen participation entails training

consumers in strategies of (a) analysis, (b) critical evaluation of alternative solutions to consumer issues and problems, and (c) influence to ensure that their voice is heard in the public and private decisions which affect consumer concerns (Bannister & Monsma, 1982). From a global perspective, these consumer concerns are not solely domestic.

Recommendation. Consumers need to be taught to appreciate the impact of their consumption decisions on the basic human rights of citizens in developing countries. They need to recognize that sometimes basic human rights need to supersede basic consumer rights or at the least become part of the consumer decision making equation (see table 2). How else can they begin to understand the world, how they affect others, and how others affect them; that is, embrace the global perspective?

Table 2

Comparison of Basic Human Rights and Basic Consumer Rights

Basic human rights (Ulrich, 1994, p.2)

Security from:	killing, torture, arrest or detention
Participation:	voice in policy, vote, express opinions, association in groups
Welfare:	education, health
Non-discrimination:	gender rights, cultural rights
Political institutions:	rule of law, legislature, executive, judicial; military

Basic consumer rights (McGregor, 1994) (all of these consumer rights assume the basic human rights)

- Information
- Choice
- Safety/health
- Voice in policy
- Redress
- Environment
- Consumer education
- Privacy
- Fairness/economic security

Conclusion #3

The investigators strongly believe that PRW has incredible potential to bring a global perspective to young consumers. It already includes many consumer issues inherent in the PRW curriculum that could benefit from

a global perspective. Parts of the curriculum already seem primed for a global perspective ("For the Teacher" and "Procedures to implement the lessons"). Many sections of three of the PRW modules are "ripe" for the inclusion of global concepts, especially those in Modules 1 and 2.

Recommendation. Work needs to be done to bring all 14 of the global principles into PRW, especially in the "Purpose" and "Scope" sections, if teachers are to be sensitized to the merits and means of bringing a global perspective to consumer education.

Recommendation. Those using PRW can initially use the following consumer issues already embedded in the content and bring a global perspective to them: transportation; advertising and the transmission of culturally sensitive messages; recreation/leisure (pursuit of leisure at expense of third world countries); non-market based economies and resultant consumer problems; international trade and the consumer interest, especially in developing countries; ethical investing; national debts; and life style choices.

Recommendation. The modules dealing with resource management and citizen participation definitely need to be revised so that a foundation can be put in place from which to bring a global perspective. The Canadian Home Economics Association⁵ (1992) has already developed a series of 16 global resource files that could supplement the PRW curriculum and serve as the substance of this initial foundation. These resource files are available from CHEA for a nominal fee and encompass global dimensions of: family studies, housing, clothing, diapers, staple foods and food securities, and work.

Conclusion

Bringing a global perspective to PRW will be a large step towards a "new consumerism" in a global marketplace. This initiative builds on the acclaimed consumer education classification system (Classi) and a new consumer economics curriculum that is gaining world wide recognition. PRW is being translated into several languages and being adapted by several developing countries (Karen Gamey, personal communication, October 4, 1994). The results of this global analysis have been shared with CHEA and with the Federal/Provincial Consumer Education and Plain Language Task Force that is turning its hand towards revising PRW. Dr. McGregor has been recently named to this task force and looks forward to the prospect of contributing to this valuable contribution to global consumer education.

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Endnotes

1. Associate Professor, Family and Consumer Studies and Policy, Home Economics Pracatice, Human Ecology Department
2. Master of Divinity Candidate, BHE, BED (Home Economics Educator studying towards Ordination in the Anglican Church).
3. PRW is available from the Manitoba Textbook Bureau, 277 Hutchings St, Winnipeg, MN, R2X 2R4 Canada 204-945-8940 (Approximately \$30.00CDN).
4. These resources files and the work done by Smith and Peterat (1992) and Lusby (1992) are available from the Canadian Home Economics Association, 901-151 Slater Street, Ottawa, ON Canada, K1P 5H3. 613-238-8817 \$10.00CDN).
5. Contact Pat Ulrich, CHEA.