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## **GARLAKE, T. (2005) DEALING WITH DISASTERS - TEACHING ABOUT DISASTERS AND DEVELOPMENT FOR AGES 11 TO 16. OXFORD, UK: OXFAM PUBLISHING.**

**Kimberly Heuschkel**

When a tsunami occurs in Southeast Asia, will students in a middle or high school classroom in Alaska be able to comprehend the extent of the devastation? Can we expect students in England to understand and work for the relief efforts made in the hurricane afflicted flood zones of Louisiana? Do earthquakes in Indonesia and famines in India shake the consciences of adolescent students halfway around the world in Brazil? As our increasingly more connected global community faces the challenges presented by natural disasters, the expectations placed on teachers to help students interpret and react to these events increase exponentially. No longer can our school curricula ignore the international faces and spaces marred by the tragedies of flooding, epidemic, and famine. Through technology, we are inundated with images that seem surreal to teachers and students alike because these disastrous happenings are so far removed from the reality of their everyday lives and experiences. To connect us to one another, the global education of future world citizens must not only be seriously considered, but also immediately embraced and undertaken.

*Dealing with Disasters* is an educational manual that strives to provide teachers with more than just the basic structures and guidelines for lessons about disasters in the world. It serves as a text that “looks at the human impact of disasters and offers students the opportunity to develop their understanding and personal opinions” (p. 3). In creating these teaching materials, Oxfam Publishing clearly reaffirms its dedication to the education of students for global citizenship. “Oxfam believes that education should build on young people’s concerns, enabling them to become ‘global citizens.’ A global citizen is someone who cares about the wider world, knows how the world works, is outraged by poverty and injustice, and takes action to change things for the better.” (p. 4) Through carefully thought out sections, this book not only provides detailed background knowledge on disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and famines; it also works to guide teachers through activities and discussions that encourage students to critically think about and interact with the issues at hand.

In an educationally responsive way, *Dealing with Disasters* provides teachers with a thorough look at how to teach adolescents about natural calamities and their effects on our societies. Section One is a reference text for teachers that provides detailed background information on natural hazards and disasters. Section Two also acts as a type of introduction, and presents lessons for the students themselves as they are introduced to not only facts about disasters but also the influence and power of the media depictions of various disastrous events (e.g., fact or opinion analysis of recreated newspaper clippings, photo and cartoon analysis). This book was originally printed in 2000 and then reprinted in 2005, so there are adjustments that may need to be made by the teacher using this guide with respect to the timeliness of the current events material utilized in the text. If a tragic event has recently occurred and can be used as a reference in the classroom, the use of photos, clippings, and artifacts from that current event may assist the students in making more meaningful connections to issues presented in the text. Students can then begin to look at the world around them in ways that can empower them as true activists for global assistance and change.

As direct complements of one another, Sections Three and Four respectively look at the causes and the effects of various disaster scenarios. From famines and landslides to cyclones and hurricanes, these two sections use worksheets and handouts to engage students in work that will facilitate understandings in a developmentally age-appropriate way. Some pages, such as the game board for “Floods in Bangladesh”, initially seem to place less than the necessary emphasis on situations caused as a result of these widespread disasters because of the Monopoly-style way in which it is presented. However, the intention of the activities seems to be one focused on the active and thoughtful engagement of the students as they are encouraged to relate personally to each topic through activities that are enjoyably presented. The information discussed in prior lessons is more than sufficient enough to allow students time to digest these weighty issues of natural destruction. Due to the entertainment potential of some of the role-playing and emotionally sensitive activities presented in *Dealing with Disasters*, it is essential that the topics be introduced and approached by the teacher with both respect and consideration for all of these aforementioned points.

Section Five serves to bring the students back to some key questions that focus on action along with the giving and evaluation of the aid that is often provided to those in need after a crisis strikes. Students are asked to read about and critically question the types of aid that are currently provided as disaster relief in activities that challenge potentially preconceived notions of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ assistance. Teacher resources including addresses for contributing organizations and websites for more information can be found after this last section. While these locations and organizations may change and/or grow yearly,

this is a contributory starting point for educators who wish to begin a community of global citizens in their own schools and classrooms.

The format of this book, with its lesson plans pre-formatted and its activities photocopy-ready, clearly lends itself to use by a middle or high school classroom teacher. Theoretically speaking, teachers should work through this book as if it were a complete curriculum; despite the section divisions presented in the manual, each lesson builds upon the concepts covered in prior activities. It has been my experience that, unfortunately, not many educators who teach at the middle and high school level have the freedom in their individual classrooms to adopt such a comprehensive piece of curriculum material without the potential of displacing another district required unit. Only if school districts have existing programs in disaster education or courses in social awareness and global economics can I see this lesson planning guide being implemented *in its entirety*, and as a result, working to its full potential.

Although the lessons were created to be used in concert with the Development Education approach, which is not currently as popular in the United States as it is in the United Kingdom, the activities were designed for teachers at all levels of content mastery and for students at a wide variety of ability levels between the ages of 11 and 18. Development Education is described by the author as aiming “to enhance young people’s awareness of global issues, [enabling] them to explore questions in depth and ... make links between their own lives and those of people in other communities and countries” (p. 7). This idea of critical thinking and active engagement with learning is being espoused in schools throughout the United States as a way to enable students to become creative thinkers and problem solvers in real world situations. Many of the activities in *Dealing with Disasters* also correlate to the National Content Standards for both Social Studies and Science. For example, the National Council for the Social Studies - Standard IX advocates helping students make global connections and develop a better understanding of interdependence, and Standard VI focuses on students’ increasing awareness of power, authority, and governance structures as forces for change (NCSS, 1994). Many of the lessons in *Dealing with Disasters* work to assist teachers as they moderate discussions and continue to encourage student engagement in these very areas.

Teachers have a responsibility to their students. They are committed by profession to assist learners as they develop into citizens who are critically and actively engaged in every aspect of learning. Students have responsibilities as well. Through hard work and perseverance, they are ultimately responsible first to themselves and then to their neighbors, to their families, to their friends, and to the world, for they are the first step in the change that needs to be made. Texts such as *Dealing with Disasters* are the touchstones that assist students in dealing with catastrophes that will continue to afflict our society. By providing information and guidance, this resource can only help teachers and students alike build bridges between the people, organizations, and nations of our growing global community.

#### References:

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