

BIOPOLITICS AND YOUTH

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Thank you for the opportunity to present a dimension of biopolitics that so far has not been discussed and, perhaps, is most essential to the survivability of the human species and our environment: Youth Dimension. The biological imperatives of the human species, survival and reproduction, rest today with our young people. Therefore, depth of understanding and appreciation of the implications of the drastic increase of knowledge and technologies in the life sciences to the quality of human and non-human life today and tomorrow is demanded of young people. And education systems must provide the curriculum and methodologies adequate to the task.

A biopolitical approach to teaching young people about international affairs is a direction mandated by the realisation of the complex linkages of human activities and the government. I believe that there are available to education a vast number of tools to fulfil this mandate. One tool I am very familiar with is the Model United Nations, which I will concentrate on, though it must be remembered that there are a myriad of methodologies being developed or already in existence.

Let me begin with a definition of the term "youth". My definition is a bit more liberal than most, accepting individuals ranging from age 12 to 30. This range of ages obviously includes students and non-students. This distinction, I feel, is important since both groups are impacted by this educational tool. The student group is the object of the tool while the non-student group is the product. In addition, the non-student group plays an intrinsic role in transmitting vital elements of the approach back to the student group, thus creating a recycling process.

The approach I am advocating is primarily a biopolitical tool. The Model United Nations is a "living" classroom - an experimental device which conveys to students the complexities of both society and its problems in the nuclear age. The Model UN is a simulation of the UN where students role play the part of UN member states representatives (ambassadors) during a 1 to 4 day conference. The experience brings to the fore the conflict between traditional beliefs or orthodoxies of society and the recent findings and knowledge of the life sciences (Caldwell, p.7). The students grapple with such biopolitical issues as: deforestation and desertification; child survival; famine; the impact of rapid industrialisation on societies and environment of developing nations etc. Unlike traditional methods of teaching the complexities of the global issues, the Model UN offers the luxury, without risk, for creativity and imagination by the student. In the simulated environment of the UN, the student may test ideas of his/her own design, limited only by the parameters of the nation-state system they must role-play. In this way, students may employ relevant and appropriate biopolitical frameworks during preparation for their role in the simulation, during the simulation process, and during the follow-up evaluation of the experience.

However, the Model UN is not sufficient alone to convey the elements required in a complete biopolitical framework. The Model UN is a tool that can bring to life for a student the realities of human behaviour of today which must be explained prior to the experience and reinforced afterwards. In short, educational systems must allow the student to participate in their own education and to recognise the important contribution such as multidisciplinary methodologies (see O'Neill, 1986), biopolitical socio-biology and the other mixes between the sciences and life sciences make to young peoples' understanding of themselves and the world they will eventually inherit.

I believe that a biopolitical approach is essential because today's youth are showing signs of despair for their future. The strains on societies' cohesiveness as we have "progressed" from small land organisations of people to the large-scale (nation-state) societies of today (which Gary Johnson argues is not the "biologically natural form of human society", see Johnson, p. 134) are more apparent amongst today's youth than ever before.

For example, an opinion poll was recently conducted by the Luter View agency in association with Nijmegen's Catholic University of 1,021 Dutch youths between the ages of 12 and 24, which demonstrated that the respondents had little confidence in the future. Most felt that pollution, unemployment and war could only escalate and nine percent even felt that by the year 2035 the world would no longer exist. Similarly, but ever more startling was a non-representative poll of American high school students attending the 1987 National High School Model UN conducted by Newslink, Inc. This poll indicated that these respondents believe that there is a probability that a nation will use a nuclear weapon in their lifetime (61.4% responded there was up to 50% or more probability). In addition, UNA-USA is in the final stage of a national high school essay contest entitled: "The UN: Looking toward the year 2000". The 30 essays submitted to the regional competition from local contests nation-wide also pointed to this frightening loss of confidence in the future. The essayists concentrated on the problems of population, hunger, disease, and bloody conflicts in our world offering little to no sense of hope that these problems could be managed or resolved.

Traditional tenets about human nature are not adequate in the face of such complexity. Youth are simply wandering about without an anchor and regurgitating what is believed to have been taught in the classroom. The simulation tool in conjunction with a biopolitical framework for teaching world politics can return a vitality to today's classroom and give the youth the knowledge and skills to have hope for their future, or untangles the confusion of and better explains who they are in the complex (unnatural) society they will inherit. The Model UN device will not only give students a better understanding of the human animal in international relations; it will also transmit the skills and personal tools for survival.

I personally do not believe that we can return to the small band organisations which was societies' normal structure for three to four million years (Johnson, p.134). Therefore, our biological survival depends on our offspring to begin adapting to this environment releasing energies that will move humanity an evolutionary step forward. I believe that we are at a cross-roads and the youth have not been given any road signs to follow. The choices they will have to make will definitely include risks. "But the society that succeeds in meshing an advancing knowledge of self and society to an ability to manipulate the material world, within the limits laid down by nature, will achieve the best prospect of survival". (Caldwell, p.11).

In conclusion, I am concerned that the youth of today are going to abandon completely any hope for survival in the next century. Biopolitics, I believe, can reverse this negative trend and renew essential optimism and hope for survival. Educational tools that incorporate biopolitical frameworks like the Model United Nations will serve our species well in preparing the youth of today for survival in the complex realities of the large scale societies in the world.

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