



Becoming International



The process of internationalization is well underway at Brock University. The recent International Conference on the Rights of the Child and Youth underscores the breadth and depth of

expertise and commitment amongst Brock faculty members and students to the pillars of internationalization.

In this issue of Research Reporter we profile two of the many scholars and scientists for whom "international" is at the core of what it is that they do. The spirit of internationalization is flourishing across the university.

Drs. Ana Sanchez and Dan Malleck of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences have been awarded a Teasdale-Corti grant through the International Development Research Centre to extend their collaborative community health and education project to the National University of Honduras.

Dr. Dolana Mogadime is leading a team of scholars from the Faculty of Education and the North West University in South Africa to consider ways to improve teacher education and literacy

Brock International, International Services, Student Services, and Research and International Development are moving forward with the development of an International Strategy. Based on the 2005 survey of international activities, the International Strategy will focus on the four pillars of internationalization – internationalization of the curriculum, increased and highly focused student mobility, enhanced faculty and staff mobility, and increased international scholarship and research. Internationalization builds on rather than detracts from our core strengths and our commitment to high-quality teaching, outstanding student experience, and excellence in research and scholarship.

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International human rights: Exploring the links between policies and people

"The disconnect between ideals and actions is universal," says Dr. Charles Burton, associate professor in the Department of Political Science. In terms of compliance with United Nations (UN) human rights conventions, we Canadians tend to smugly compare ourselves to our American neighbours, rather than to the international community. But, looking more closely, we can recognize the discrepancies between our ideals and our policies.

For example, while we profess the virtues of universal access to higher education, the current trend toward government cutbacks to social programs points in another direction. Ever-increasing tuitions and fees lead to increasing student debt loads, deterring many lower-income Canadians from continuing to university. Staggering student debts threaten to return higher education to a privilege of the wealthy. We, like many nations, don't always practise what we preach.

While China enjoys considerable social consensus on the rights of children, nevertheless, abuses do occur. Chinese children have traditionally enjoyed cultural privileges, but a family with insufficient means may send a child out to work. On the streets of Beijing, young children who should be in school wash cars instead, often in full view of the governing communist party officials. Poverty forces the abandonment of even the most

cherished cultural ideals.

The rights of children are of particular interest to Burton. "Children don't have the vote ... so they tend to fall down on the list of priorities."

Burton has high hopes for an optional protocol proposed to be attached to the International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (ESCR) that would promote compliance. The ESCR protocol grants individuals access to the UN Human Rights Commission if they feel that a state is not fulfilling its UN obligations.



"I'm interested ... in how we can get world peace through world law."

Dr. Charles Burton
(with his son, Geoffrey)

The conventions establish "reference points by which NGOs and other governments can measure compliance" and provide some "intellectual ammunition" if a government is not maintaining the international standard.

Burton believes that moral suasion can be a real and effective agent for change. Indeed, international foreign participation has had a

good influence on China's human rights record. Countries like China go to great lengths to avoid denunciation by the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Thanks to the letter campaigns organized by Amnesty International focusing the world's attention, many political prisoners have been released. "Once you establish benchmarks by which nations can be measured in terms of their implementation or non-implementation, then this empowers elements from within and without

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the country to call the government to task. And most governments do, to some extent, respond.”

Currently, Burton is assessing bilateral human rights dialogues for the Canadian government. The goal is to determine the most effective way for Canada to interact with China to facilitate greater compliance with UN human rights conventions. “If we can come up with some way to connect [the conventions] with policy or programming that will actually have an impact on social justice for real Chinese people, that would be great.”

While progress has been made in China, Burton notes that the future is still uncertain. He is unsure of the impact of various political elements. There may be polarization between

progressive and nationalistic elements.

Burton is one of the few people involved in both the academic and the policy debates in Canada. “Those involved in policy-making don’t tend to be reading the literature, and the people writing the literature tend to be dealing more with ideals than practice. I think that’s regrettable in Canada.”

Burton is happy to be able to see the issues from both sides, helping to bridge the gap between academe and government. “It’s a question of balancing teaching, research and public service.”

~ by *Jeannie Mackintosh*
(based on an interview by
SPARK reporter, Giles Holland)

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Toward emancipation and empowerment: Embracing human rights for children & youth

“Listen to kids. They’ll tell you what they need.”

Professor Richard Mitchell of Child and Youth Studies has great faith in the ability of children to understand and articulate their own needs. “They’ve been trying to tell you for 15 years now since Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,” he says. “But, there hasn’t always been anyone listening.”

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was developed at an international event co-hosted by Canada and introduced to the global community 15 years ago. Canada ratified the convention and “for a few years things were going nicely,” says Mitchell, “but, we’ve done nothing since.” According to Mitchell, the Young Offenders Act remains the only legislative evidence of our adoption of CRC principles.

The CRC seeks to guarantee every child a distinct set of human rights including the right to participate in decisions impacting that child, and to be appropriately informed of all the rest of their rights.

Most Canadian youth still do not know anything about the CRC. “That in itself is a violation of their international human rights under Article 42 of the Convention,” says Mitchell.

“Canada has (rightfully in many instances) earned an international reputation as a protector and promoter of human rights,” says Mitchell. But, regardless of our reputation, and repeated warnings from the UN, most Canadians continue to disregard the CRC.

Mitchell was recently asked, “What kind of nation gives its citizens rights and then doesn’t tell them?” Although it would be generous to say we are “blissfully unaware,” Mitchell blames an intentional “misrepresentation” of the CRC as a threat to family values.

In fact, in 1999 Elections Canada and UNICEF hosted a national child and youth vote on the Rights of the Child to determine which right Canadian children valued above all others. In spite of a political movement to discredit the initiative and the UN as anti-family, 775,000 students participated in the poll. Ironically, over 25% valued the “right to have a family” above all others.

Mitchell’s passion for the rights of children and his previous research and writing led to his involvement in the

organization of Investment and Citizenship, an international conference on child and youth rights held at Brock University in July.

Brock is one of only a handful of universities that offers full courses on children’s human rights.

Mitchell stresses the importance of understanding what a rights-based approach to research and child advocacy looks like. “It doesn’t necessarily mean giving in to the child’s wishes, but sometimes kids are extraordinarily prescient, aware and insightful into their own development.”

So what keeps Mitchell going in the face of an apparent lack of political will to implement the CRC? Like the African American educator and social activist, Ms. Bell Hooks, Mitchell “assumes optimism.”

He points to a decline in the global Under-Five Mortality Rate as a reason for hope. “In September 1990, the day Brian Mulroney co-chaired the UN’s World Summit for Children there were 5 billion of us on the planet and 45,500 children under five died. 15 years later, that rate has dropped by 30% to about 29,000 per day at the same time as the population has ballooned. So, something is working.”

The management of polio and near-eradication of river blindness is also encouraging. But, Mitchell says, “the good news stories are largely unknown.”

“Today, there are 6.5 billion of us on this planet all trying to survive. I think we will. But a recognition of human rights will be essential in helping us navigate that dance.

“I guess my Utopia would be ‘all kids, all rights, all the time’, but realistically I just want all kids to learn they have a set of human rights distinct from adults,” says Mitchell. “This is not about rescuing kids, it’s about emancipation.”



“Canadians assume we are champions of human rights. In fact, we have dropped the ball when it comes to the rights of children.”

Dr. Richard Mitchell

~ by *Jeannie Mackintosh*