Talking Globally

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ABSTRACT:

Talking Globally is an annotated transcript of a discussion conducted by myself in a fifth grade classroom in a public school in an affluent suburban town in the northeast U.S. The stimulus for the discussion was a brief text, taken from Kofi Anan's *We The Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century,* which offers a brief, vivid statistical picture of the planetary distribution of resources. In response, the students generated 14 questions, which ranged across a broad variety of topics, including the national debt, US weapons development and production, the war in Iraq, and the relationship of both of those to US policies towards poorer nations. Other themes are raised, considered, left, and revisited, in a process of recursion–of moving forward and then circling back to pick up earlier issues and positions. The claim that the US government is irrational is one of these–a claim exacerbated by the fact that this conversation took place during a period of intense, emergent criticism of the US war in Iraq. The broad empirical claims which are offered–the idea, for example, of the kind and status of the national debt–are made up of relatively isolated "bytes" of information, which are woven abductively into a larger speculative picture. But there are also broadly grasped principles–gleaned by that reflexive intelligence which intuitively synthesizes information from the media, from school and from conversations with elders– which allow certain participants to present accounts of how things are which make up in imagination and general understanding what they lack in detail.

INTRODUCTION

The annotated transcript which follows represents two discussions conducted by myself in a fifth grade classroom in a public school in an affluent suburban town in northern New Jersey, in May 2004. Seven of the twenty class members were African American, one Asian-German, one Spanish and one Polish, and all of them from relatively affluent families. It was a class which was versed in group dialogue, a majority of them having participated in Philosophy for Children sessions, conducted once a week, from first or second grade on. Their classroom teacher, herself a doctoral student in Philosophy for Children at the local university, had been conducting regular sessions throughout the year, and they had also been participating in a weekly philosophy of mathematics session, conducted by a doctoral student engaged in research in children's thinking with paradoxes, for most of the year. I was a familiar figure to them, having taught most of them in previous years. As the conversation will indicate, they had been studying the US colonial and revolutionary period in social studies class throughout the year.

I presented a brief text, taken from a book by Kofi Annan, as a stimulus. The first 40 minutes session was devoted to developing questions in response to the text, and the second, held the next day, to choosing one or more of those questions for discussion. The question-generating period was characterized by a great deal of spontaneous conversation between and about the questions under development, which lends to the transcript of the first discussion a certain disjointed quality, since I was anxious to keep the process going. The questions were transcribed the classroom teacher on chart paper. I took them home after the session, typed them up, and distributed them the next day. The text and the questions follow, and a partial transcript of part of the first, question-generating session, and all of the second. All names except my own have been changed.

Text:

> Imagine that the world really is a «global village.»
> Then:
> 150 people live in an affluent area of the village
> 780 people live in poorer districts
> 70 people live in a transitional district (between affluent and poor)
>
> AVERAGE INCOME IN THE VILLAGE: $6000 USD per year
>
> 200 people have 86% of all the money, houses, cars, etc.
> 500 people (half the village) make less than $2.00 a day
> 300 people are somewhere in between
>
> From Kofi Annan, *We The Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. New York: United Nations, 2000, p. 14.

Questions:

1. Why can't we work for ourselves? (Stan)
2. Why do they make innocent children work for $2.00 a day? (Elizabeth)
3. Why can't we lower prices so that we can all afford things? (Indara)
4. How can one country make itself richer than another? (Leo)
5. Why is everything made in China? (Sarah)
6. Why don't these people (the poor and exploited) stand up for themselves? (Cheyenne)
7. Since we are the richest country, why do we have others do for us? (Stanley)
8. Why is there such a big difference between what the worker makes and what the seller makes? (Letitia)
9. Why do we spend so much on what we want when people don't have what they need in other countries? (Ibn)
10. Why are there so many weapons? (Leo)
11. How can it be that Japan is so prosperous after we «nuked» them, and why have they forgiven us? (Stan)
12. Why do we have to have weapons to use instead of words? (Elizabeth)
13. Why do we have to have war? Is it necessary? (Cheyenne)
14. Why does everything in the U.S. have to be about «freedom»? (Fernando)

Transcript	Commentary
FIRST SESSION	
Elizabeth: Children are not meant to work hard when they're that little.	In explaining her question, Elizabeth implicitly introduces the idea of a natural order.
Indara: Why can't we lower prices?	
Leo: Why is that one country can make itself richer than another country?	Leo implicitly raises the question of human agency
Cheyenne: Why won't these people stand up for themselves?	A normative or a descriptive question?
Stanley: If we're so rich, why can't we produce things ourselves, and make jobs for everyone?	Stanley implicitly raises questions of will, subjectivity, responsibility.
Franky: We're up there as a really rich country, but we're actually a kind of jerky country–if you notice it–like not too nice of a country. Kind of sneaky. Not too nice of a country.	Franky introduces a moral critique.
David: Not too nice to other countries, you mean?	
Franky: Yeah, like a lot of countries are poor. Like Haiti. And we should just grab a bunch of money, give it to them, and everyone's happy. But we don't because this country's pretty jerky. We're interested in making our own money rather than thinking of others who we could easily help. We've got, like . . . so much money. But some of the money we have we use to defend ourselves also. So . .	Franky invokes the idea of a natural order and rational sharing behavior which results from following it spontaneously. He introduces a counterexample, complicating his own idea.
Fernando: The reason we don't give money to other countries is because we're constantly in debt–already like 100 million dollars or something. And we're always spending and getting even lower, I mean even higher in debt, and that's why we don't give to other people.	Fernando introduces a possible empirical explanation for the imbalance.
Letitia: Why is it that the people who sell the products raise their prices up really high, and the people who make them get paid almost nothing?	Letitia implicitly invokes the idea of a natural economic order–an order of human exchange–and the possibility of it being abused.
Ibn: I disagree with Fernando because there has been other times, like the Ethiopian for instance, that's a *really* poor country, and there have been times when we were just overflowing with dough, like you could tear it up and you wouldn't care, and we like just kept on spending it on nothing . . . wars . . . guns, all we spend it on is guns and nuclear weapons. And then go over to other countries looking for nuclear weapons and it's	Ibn builds on Fernando's empirical explanation for economic imbalance, and offering war and weapons production as the source of debt. Ibn imputes of irrationality to the state.

not even there . . . My question is, why are we spending so much money on . . . like we already have the stuff that we need, we just buy extra stuff that we just want, not what we need, but the other countries that don't have what they need, like healthy water and all that kind of stuff . . . countries like Haiti and Ethiopia–we have enough money to fix some spots up–just fix it up and make it nice and clean and probably send some money over there or something like that, and not spend so much money on ourselves, but we . . . like we need money, like for entertainment and stuff, that's extra stuff that we need–that we want even though we don't really need it. But like certainly tired of spending it on, like bombs . . .

Ibn introduces a distinction between wants and needs. This is a potential criterion for normative deliberation.

Ibn's criticism invokes an idea of natural order, and of its betrayal in the US by, not just the state, but the people.

Leo: If the US is in debt and still buying the technology to bomb the–to blow up the world twice . . . Then why would they actually want to do that? And second of all, if you're in debt you shouldn't be buying stuff that you've never even gonna use. Are you really gonna use something to blow up the world twice? I mean that would basically be saying, I'll blow myself up twice. I mean maybe in a thousand years they'll be blowing up other planets and stuff, but I think that now they should just get on with paying their debts. . . And also, to answer the question why do the people that make things get paid less than the sellers, well it's because a lot of the time the people that make it are being underpaid because their boss is just trying to make a lot of money, and then when he sells it to the sellers, to the people who are actually going to eat it or whatever, then the sellers will raise the price so they can get a lot of money . . . and the bigger the factory the more workers you need, and if you don't have that many workers, then you're going to have to pay them less most of the time . . . until you get to like the minimum wage. Then you can't go any lower–or you can't go any lower than their contract. But . . . .

Leo builds on the idea of irrationality of the state.

Leo accepts the critique of weapons production, and attempts to resolve the difference by taking it to the normative level.

Leo offers a tentative systemic explanation of market structure, involving concepts of supply and demand, scale, and ratio.

David: You were basically saying that there's something irrational about the weapons thing? That it doesn't make sense?

David summarizes argument for the irrationality of the state.

Leo: Yeah. Why don't they just pay their debt instead of making stuff that they're never going to use?

Stanley: Japan has forgiven us a whole lot–after we *nuked* them! Now we're getting all kinds of things from them–after we nuked them! How could they have forgiven us?

Stanley builds on the idea of irrationality or incomprehensibility of governments.

Elizabeth: The weapons . . . we don't need them. We don't need them. I mean sure we can have a few weapons, just to defend ourselves, but we don't need that many, and we shouldn't be spending that much on that particular thing.

Elizabeth shifts from explaining national debt as a result of weapons production to normative judgment on weapons themselves. It was already implicit in previous arguments.

Cheyenne: I don't see why we have to make war instead of just talking it out. Like why do we have to fight? Why do we have to have war? Like we destroyed Iraq but now we're going to build it up again.

Cheyenne moves another step: from questioning weapons production to questioning war itself.

Another imputation of governmental irrationality.

Fernando: Why is the US always . . . like everything about them has to be «freedom.» Once we had a disagreement with France, like really recently, and we started to call French Fries [sarcastically] «*Freedom Fries*» . . . [general laughter].

Fernando makes a lateral shift from war and weapons production to the *rhetoric* of war and weapons production.

Leo: Once I went into this place and asked for French fries and they said, «You mean *Freedom* fries,» and I'm like, *whatever*.

Leo extends the critique, not just to US rhetoric, but to the nationalistic mob and the imputation of hypocrisy.

David: Are you saying that when the US says «freedom,» what do they mean? Are you calling for a definition?

David attempts to clarify the question.

Fernando: It's just that I don't know why everything in the US has to be «freedom»–and they're really not.

Fernando restates Leo's judgment of nationalist hypocrisy.

Elizabeth: We sort of do have freedom, but you know . . . Let's say you do something bad and it's freedom and you get arrested. I mean what's the point of that if you have freedom? It's like . . . define freedom.

Elizabeth problematizes of the concept of freedom (probably associating with David's asking Fernando if he was calling for a definition).

Franky: It's like you say define freedom. But maybe they should have freedom to break into a house and then grab something . . .

Franky explores further the concept of freedom: freedom *to* versus freedom *from.*

Ibn: You have freedom to keep your stuff.

Franky: . . . because that's still their freedom. Say I want to go like that [makes a play- aggressive gesture at person sitting next to him] and no

Franky introduces the idea of «complete and utter freedom.» He knows it is counterintuitive, but wants to explore universalizing the concept.

one's going to stop me because it gives me complete and utter freedom.

Ibn: You can have some good freedoms.

Ibn stays with pluralizing the concept.

Elizabeth: I don't think freedom . . . I mean you have to have freedom to do whatever you want, but why call it freedom? Because if you do whatever you want, you could get arrested, you could get in big big trouble. I thought freedom was just being free and just being happy.

Elizabeth identifies and emphasizes the contradiction implicit in the notion of freedom understood only as freedom *to*, and initiates the search for another definition–i.e. «happiness' (Aristotle's *eudemonia*).

Stanley: You have to draw the line somewhere. You can't have people running around and doing anything. Because if you push someone around you're free to do that but then they're free to hit you on the head for it.

Stanley clarifies and explores the idea introduced by Franky of «complete and utter» freedom.

Morgan: Freedom is not that you can do whatever you want. You can shoot someone in the head but you're arrested and you don't have freedom in jail.

Morgan produces a negative definition of freedom, in preparation for a redefinition. She has missed Elizabeth's (vague) hypothesis of freedom as *eudemonia*.

Elizabeth: You have to draw the line somewhere. You can't call the other half–that evil part–freedom.

Elizabeth obliges, and pursues the contradiction between two kinds of freedom.

Franky: But if you draw a line somewhere–say you squash a . . . say a squirrel and you go to jail–then you're not giving them complete and utter freedom.

Franky insists on sticking to the possibility of a «complete and utter freedom»–a freedom without contradictions or self-negating characteristics.

Ibn: But that's not freedom.

Ibn insists that the contradiction negates the concept. Franky insists that in that case the concept doesn't exist.

Franky: I know it's bad but it's still freedom.

David: Morgan said an action is not free which leads to unfreedom. She said if you feel free to kill somebody you end up in jail and you end up not free. She's saying by implication anything which leads to unfreedom is not free.

David restates the contradiction as a behavioral principle, i.e. in time. He is attempting to retrack the conversation.

Elizabeth: And also Stanley Franklin says . . . in the Declaration of Human Rights everyone has a right to vote. But what about us kids?

Elizabeth jumps.

All: Yeah! [and smiling]

Elizabeth: It's just like we're «chopped liver.»

Ibn: I don't like those kids voting, because then . . [inaudible] they don't know what they're talking about.

Ibn offers a broad normative judgment on the US as acting unjustly.

SECOND SESSION

David: [after class deliberation on which question to start with] Let's start with the wants/

needs question [#9]. Ibn, it was your question. Do you want to start us off?

Ibn: We're the richest country in the world and we have all the stuff we need and more. And some countries don't even have what they need. And we have all the stuff we want, like clubs and all that kind of stuff, like superclubs, stuff like that, while other countries don't have survival things. Like most countries don't even have clean water–like Ghana or Nigeria, they don't have clean water, while we have water cleaners and extra water cleaners, which they don't even have water.

David: Is it easy to tell the difference between wants and needs?

David redirects to the distinction on which the question hangs.

Elizabeth: Well it is. Let's take a bike, for instance. A bike is something you want because let's say you don't want to walk to your friend's house or you don't want your parents to drive you to your friend's house, you want to bike to your friend's house. So you don't really need that bike.

Elizabeth offers an example.

Stanley: If you're in a poor country . . .

Stanley contextualizes the example.

David: A bike might be absolutely a need. [summarizes story of De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*]

David offers an example.

Morgan: Sometimes you might want something so bad that you think it's a need.

Morgan qualifies the distinction with a psychological analysis.

David: You lose touch with the distinction.

Elizabeth: And also with wants in this country, they're much different from needs. Like what you said about the man who needed a bicycle to get to work. That's a *need*. But here we have so much that we really don't need a bicycle.

Elizabeth restates the contextual element of the distinction.

David: So the criterion you're making to distinguish between wants and needs. . . You had *choices* on how to get to your friend's house. And when you don't have choices, its' a need?

David attempts to identify the criterion on which the distinction hinges.

Fernando: We're trying to say that everything in the US is a want. But some people in the US are not rich. Like Montclair is a really reach town. Some places in the US don't have those rich people and have people as poor as people in other countries. It depends on where you're talking about.

Fernando explores and complicates the contextual analysis further and provides another example.

Ibn: Well not really where, but just *who*.

Ibn modifies the distinction which Fernando's example is aimed at.

Fernando: Even if you have like one rich person . . . Well not rich, but with money . . Usually there are people *around* that person. . . So like poor people can't come into Montclair. . . We haven't even finished helping poor people in our country, so why would the US help people in other countries if our country is still not . . finished.

Fernando defends his analysis of the example through making a sociological judgment–the affluent stick together–and then returns the conversation to the earlier theme of the reason the US does not appear to be acting justly.

Morgan: If you have negative $10 in your bank account, how are you supposed to give someone else $20.

Morgan supports this return be reinvoking the hypothesis that it is debt which leads to US policy toward poor nations.

David: So you're agreed that it's because the States are in debt that they can't help other countries or even the poor people within the country?

David restates Morgan's point.

Ibn: I disagree a whole lot. Just because at any certain time we're in debt doesn't mean we couldn't help any country. Twenty years ago when we were the richest people, never in debt, and had a million dollars over the richest person ever. We had so much money that we could build another planet and still used to have 32 billion dollars left. And we would spend it on stupid stuff like entertainment when other countries are dying because [inaudible]. . . . No we don't have it now–I admit that we're in debt now. Because of the stupid stuff we spend it on like nuclear bombs. Let's say that the United States was just born and we had a billion infinity dollars. Some number infinite. We had so much money but we spent it on building nuclear bombs. Nuclear bombs. Machine guns. Going to war. We spent it on stupid stuff like that. *Now* we're in debt, because of Bush is in the Office. Now we don't have any money because we're spending it on stupid stuff. But we could of!

Ibn picks up his previous disclaimer of a relationship between US debt and its policy, and his moral critique of US policies and the behaviors of the population.

Ibn returns to the argument about debt and militarism.

David: I'm not sure about that debt. I haven't noticed that it's changed my lifestyle, or yours, such that you aren't able to do something that you weren't able to do a year ago. So I'm just registering some doubt about what this debt means. I know there is debt, but what does it do to the US life style?

David challenges the explanatory power of the debt hypothesis with a concrete example.

Leo: Ibn, are you saying that when the US was just born we had a zillion dollars? Just so you

Leo builds on the challenge to Ibn's connection between debt and war. He uses a historical

know, when the US was starting out they were in debt, so . . . They were owing money because when they started they spend so much money on getting cannons from France and Britain. Even though we're in debt, the US has a lot of money. It's just that they've not paying a lot of their debts as quickly as some people think they are. And since Bush made three wars, that's spending a lot of money and it put us back into a big debt, but it doesn't mean that it's actually like hurting our lives or anything.

example, to counter Ibn's earlier rhetorical device of offering a chronological picture.

David: What *needs* to happen?

David shifts to the question, «What is to be done?»

Cheyenne: We think we need everything but we really don't. We want to have everything so we can be entertained and everything.

Cheyenne does not pick up on the shift, but continues the analysis.

David: That's just human? Or is that what's happened in the States?

David obliges, and attempts to go deeper with Cheyenne's explanation.

Cheyenne: It's kind of what happens when people. . . Like we end up spending all this money on entertainment. Like we don't need all this entertainment stuff–like we can live without it.

Cheyenne begins a response to David's call for deeper reasons, then falls back on a restatement of her point.

David: But the question is, why does the imbalance come, and why is the imbalance maintained, why can't it be corrected?

David tries another way around in order to get to the normative and the practical.

Letitia: Why do we spend it on what we want when other people don't have it? It might happen somewhere else too, but I think it's happening to us that we're just becoming greedier and greedier, we take everything in for ourselves. So like, yes, we do spend a lot on entertainment, but we do spend some money on what we need, but I think basically that all, a majority of what we have is going toward entertainment.

Letitia develops Cheyenne's descriptive judgment, and introduces the notion of greed.

David: Are you saying it's a principle of human greed? That human's are greedy?

David again attempts to call forth a more categorical judgment.

Letitia: No, it's not like a human nature kind of thing, but I think it's mostly the people who have money, who have more than they really need, and they're . . [inaudible].

Letitia begins to formulate a causal explanation.

David: Why not?

Letitia: Because some of us–not here–but some of us in certain places where there are people

who have money while the people around them don't . . .

David: Like other places in the world?

Alicia: All we need is food and shelter. If you go back to Adam and Eve, all they had was fruit, water, and like leaves, that's all they had. And now all of a sudden we want all these modern tech things like cars . .[inaudible] So I don't think we need anything.

Alicia offers an argument from nature by going back to an original human placement vis a vis the earth, its resources, and the appropriate human use of them.

David: So you're saying we're living beyond our means. We're taking more than we need. Is there agreement about that?

David attempts to draw implications from Alicia's argument.

Muhamed: I agree. I know a friend who has five TV's in one room. And the government . . . Let's say the government has 500 dollars and they start a war then for the war they spend thousands of dollars. So basically what I'm saying is that they're spending more than they have.

Muhamed offers an example by way of agreement, and returns to the theme of the irrationality of the nation state.

David: Letitia was pointing out that it's all over the world . . . That you find those extremely rich people surrounded by lots of poor people.

Stanley: I think that we lost a lot of money on the war. I personally think that George Bush had a hunch and he was wrong. . . So we didn't have to go over there. It would have been different if we hadn't, but it's not as important to America.

Stanley attempts to return to an analysis of the current war.

. . . . . .

David: I'd like to end up by thinking about, is it possible to do anything, or are we just inevitable victims of this system and we're going to grow up and we're going to fall right into place . . . in other words, is it possible to do something about it?

David forestalls him, and offers the same question as before–What is to be done?–for conclusion. But he has added another element: *Can* anything be done?

Sarah: If you have a lot of money and you're just keeping it for yourself, you could be helping someone with that and helping to get someone, say . . . something like clothes–that they need. . . . Or the government, instead of paying lots of money for weapons, could pay money, they could pay money to get themselves out of debt and so stop being in debt and have more money to do things for other people–to help them get the things they *need*.

Sarah offers, first a personal, then a national principle for correcting the situation.

David: That's what needs to be done?

Fernando: Well I don't see why everyone thinks it's so greedy to spend money on what we want rather than what we need. If the US didn't spend money on entertainment we'd still have Windows 90 instead of Windows 2003–we wouldn't have *anything*. I don't see why everyone thinks that war is stupid–that anything that concerns war is stupid. Because if we didn't spend money and we didn't buy cannons from France, then we'd probably all be slaves for Great Britain. If people disagree with each other, then what are you going to do? You have to go to war if you disagree with someone . . . and duke it out.

Fernando responds indirectly or by implication to Sarah by suggesting, first, that excess–or at least the confusion between needs and wants–is necessary for general growth; and second, that war and weapons production are sometimes unavoidable, and can also lead to growth–using as an example the outcomes of the American Revolution. These are two questions which could be pursued in further conversations.

David: So you're saying that war is necessary.

Fernando: There really is no other way if you disagree with another person . . . Like what if he says, «I want your land»?

Fernando gives the most compelling example for the necessity of war.

David: Fernando has two things: about overproduction. The line between wants and needs are not so clear, and if we didn't produce for our wants our needs might not . . . He gave this technology example, meaning if we didn't have this overproduction, we wouldn't have the technology we do . . . And then he said that war is inevitable since there's always going to be conflict.

David attempts to summarize and indicate the importance of Fernando's two points.

Leo: I disagree with Fernando because first of all war is not necessary. You can always do *trades* and stuff to resolve it, or like make pacts or stuff like that.

And also if we were still a colony of Great Britain it wouldn't be just that we were Great Britain and not American. We wouldn't be slaves.

Leo counters Fernando's argument for the necessity of war, and more indirectly, the necessity of wants like that. And also needs confusion and conflict for growth.

Elizabeth: First of all I disagree with Fernando. we don't need war to do everything. I know it's a way to protect us, but still . . . and going back to what Indara said, I don't think we're greedy because of taxes, but just that taxes are getting higher so we can pay back the debt.

Elizabeth vacillates and slips off point.

Ibn: I *way* disagree with Fernando, because he just said if you have a disagreement you have to duke it out. But let's just say you dropped a dollar on the ground and then I run for it and you say it's yours, I'm gonna have to blow your head off with a M-16, right? Thank you! Now!

Ibn attempt forcefully to refute Fernando with a rhetorical example.

And another thing! Haven't you been taught in school for almost all your life that violence is not the answer? First of all we were trying to say that Great Britain shouldn't have kept us as a colony of theirs because they used violence–that's what we were trying to say. Now, since we don't have it any more, we shouldn't have any wars. If you have in some way a disagreement you talk it out with trades or something, like Leo said, something may be valuable to a different country, and the country has something that's valuable to you–not go blow their head off.

Ibn attempts to turn Fernando's example of the American revolution against itself, by arguing that it was, in intention anyway, a «war to end all wars.»

Franky: The reason we have wars is because we can't agree on something. Both sides will talk it out and if they can't agree in any way they will get into war and they will fight.

Franky comes to Fernando's support by arguing that war is a necessary last resort, and that some issues are impervious to compromise.

David: We're left with the question of whether war is necessary or not, and we're left with the question of whether what Sarah suggests can be done–is possible. And if it's not possible, why? My question is, is it so big that it will always win? The inequalities will always reproduce themselves, and it's impossible to do something about it in an active way? Final conclusions?

David restates, and offers his question again: What is it possible for us to do about the situation? What agency do we have in changing the situation we are describing?

Leo: O.K., basically my conclusion is that I think that war is wrong, but some people think that sometimes you have to do it. I personally think you don't, but . . .

Leo summarizes the disagreement.

David: And what about economic inequality?

Leo: I think with that that the US is just a rich country and a bunch of other countries are not as rich and some are poor, but in all the US is pretty balanced except for some parts, and then there are a lot of other countries that are somewhat balanced, and there are some that are extreme ones.

Leo summarizes the situation with which the conversation began, and avoids any judgments.

David: Thank you all, and I'll see you in another life.

They will be graduating the next day...

CONCLUSIONS

Although the thematic structure of the conversation is fairly stable, it is characterized by branching and proliferation. Themes are taken up, connected with other themes, slip sideways or jump associatively. The major themes are founded on broad empirical claims, propositions, or hypotheses–in particular the national debt, US weapons development and production, the war in Iraq, and the relationship of both of those to US policies towards poorer nations. Certain branches go no further than they go–the discussion of freedom for example, which although it certainly has promise for an extended conversation, is prevented by the purpose of the first session, which is question development. Other themes are raised, considered, left, and revisited, in a process of recursion–of moving forward and then circling back to pick up earlier issues and positions. The claim that the US government is irrational is one of these–a claim exacerbated by the fact that this conversation took place during a period of intense, emergent criticism of the US war in Iraq.

There were moments in the dialogue, triggered by key interventions, which represented potential moments for deepening and/or widening the conversation. One was the discussion of freedom, which developed into a standoff of positions, and the presentation of an interesting contradiction whereby freedom and unfreedom were linked, thus negating the idea of what Franky referred to as a «complete and utter freedom.» Another was Fernando's suggestion, offered as a counterargument to the prevailing judgment, that not only was the blurring of wants and needs a key element in social, cultural and technological development, but that war might just be unavoidable. In the interest of the particular project I had in mind (i.e. children discussing globalization) and because of severe contextual constraints (the conversations took place on the last two days of the school year), I did not try to stop or slow down the conversation at these points in order to fully integrate them. If the conversation represented the first two of a longer series, perhaps keyed to a social studies curriculum, my strategy would be to identify those themes which promised structural deepening and expansion and return to them, aided by further brief texts, exercises and discussion plans which would help to both focus and better contextualize the issue.

Although I do not have the data to document it, it seems clear that, as is usual with conversations with children (and all who are reasoning about something about which they have few available facts at hand), the broad empirical claims which are offered–the idea, for example, of the kind and status of the national debt–are made up of relatively isolated «bytes» of information, which are woven abductively into a larger speculative picture. But there are also broadly grasped principles–gleaned by that reflexive intelligence which intuitively synthesizes information from the media, from school and from conversations with elders– which allow certain participants to present accounts of how things are which make up in imagination and general understanding what they lack in detail. Leo's characterization of the market system and the relation between prices, labor, size of plant and numbers of workers is just such a synthesis. In a sense this is «unknown knowledge»–knowledge which has only to be triggered in order to emerge in a preliminary formulation.

The political, class and economic interests of the participants' families also act as a silent backdrop to the arguments which are put. Ibn, for example, is a highly social and outgoing person from what I would guess is an African-American family with very clearly articulated, critical views of the US government and its policies. Fernando, although he is fully assimilated linguistically and socially into

the US culture, is from an upward-mobile Spanish immigrant family. Their arguments can at least in part be understood as reflecting their class positioning. This is in no way delegitimates those arguments: Fernando has a clear penchant for complex dialectical reasoning, and is skilled in analyzing and fruitfully complicating arguments and examples; Ibn argues clearly and consistently from ethical principles.

As I've already stated, these two conversations could represent the first, introductory inquiries in a curriculum for elementary students on globalization. Given the widely interdisciplinary nature of globalization studies–from economics to politics to anthropology and culture studies to applied ethics to gender and environmental issues–the field presents an ideal framework for an integrated social studies curriculum. The critical moral and ethical issues associated with globalization, are, as demonstrated in a preliminary way by this discussion, within the grasp of upper elementary and middle and certainly high school students. Children's ignorance of these issues are the fault, not of their developmental status, but of the fact that they are typically tacitly shielded from them by parents who are conditioned to shield themselves as well. The negative effects of globalization are, especially for those who most profit from them, the unspeakable–the shadow into which those standing in the light of the material «good fortune» it brings dare not gaze. Perhaps Elizabeth's complaint about children being denied the right to vote, an apparent non-sequitur in the conversation, represents the key possibility offered by introducing children to these issues. As Sarah's concluding summary, offered slowly and thoughtfully, indicates, children have not yet given up on those intuitive notions of reciprocity and communal responsibility which in fact their parents, while unable to live them themselves, have indoctrinated them into. It could be that if they are allowed to see the contradictions in these ideals earlier rather than later, that there might be more hope of their retaining the courage to face and resolve them as they grow into adulthood.

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