

# A Global Education Framework for AFS

## BACKGROUND

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Throughout its history, AFS has attempted to address some of the most difficult and challenging needs of our societies. In the first days of the American Field Service ambulance corps, young volunteers picked up the wounded from the battlefields of our two World Wars, responding in a direct and human way to the tragic results of our conflicts with each other. As the world situation changes, AFS is continually challenged to change its perspective and assumptions, to clarify its values, and to take new actions to transcend national and cultural borders in order to find better ways for our societies to live and work together.

At the core of all our efforts to change the world is the belief that this is done through education in its broadest sense. For nearly 50 years, the AFS program has embraced the concept that a dramatic change in perspective is a special and critical experience that has a major, positive impact on the lives of young people and, therefore, on the world. As an organization, we, too, go through these transforming experiences that turn our view of the organization completely around to integrate new information, new people, and new realities.

Building on the concept that AFS uses an educational process as a means to build a better world society, at the 1993 World Congress in Switzerland we devised a new mission statement to express more clearly the goals and values we all share.

## The AFS Mission Statement

### **AFS Statement of Purpose**

*AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.*

### **The Core Values and Attributes of AFS**

*AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.*

*AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion or social status.*

*AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.*

With this mission statement to direct our approach, we determined at that Congress that we needed a Global Education Framework to unite our programs and activities in a logical way.

## **Why such a framework and why “global education?”**

A major focus in AFS has been “intercultural learning” — a process that uses a well-planned immersion in another culture as a tool to move people mentally, emotionally, and physically to a deeper awareness of their own culture’s norms, behaviors, relationships, and visions. This is still an essential aspect and goal of the AFS experience, but it is not our entire goal. We see that our world continues to be burdened by nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia, and we want to do more. We are concerned about human rights abuses, the lack of social integration, and the deterioration of the environment, and we want it understood that participating in AFS means caring about these issues and striving to create a more just and peaceful world.

While we firmly believe that it is important to recognize that different cultures have different values, we want to promote the values that bring us together, with all our different cultural perspectives, to work on these common concerns. These are the core values which are part of our mission statement and which have been expounded by the worldwide community as those which truly foster peace and tolerance. These are the values and responsibilities of “global citizens,” those that have been endorsed by many peoples and governments around the world in such documents as the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the UNESCO integrated framework for peace, human rights, and democracy.

“Global Education” addresses the whole range of concerns that people of the world share, the issues that divide us, and the problems that we face. It is mission-driven education that promotes a common commitment to the world and its people. It encourages people to be aware of their actions and how these affect others. It promotes respect, tolerance, and justice. It demands that we look for ways to change the world when it does not meet these standards, when resources are unfairly allocated, when conflicts between people erupt in violence, when human rights are abused. It demands that we constantly reassess our efforts and the solutions we have tried.

For AFS, this is more than an intellectual exercise connected with written materials and statements. AFS has always been people, and for AFS, global education is education that involves people in every way: intellectually, emotionally, morally, and experientially.

In fact, AFS has been providing various aspects of global education for many years by offering opportunities to participants to become engaged in meaningful activities in their host and home communities. The service activities that have been incorporated in our programs in many places have stimulated the participants’ understanding of issues that affect their community and the world. We know that the traditional exchange programs we have offered have in many ways fostered the environment where global education is possible. The development of AFS’s Global Education Framework is a

step to unite even more clearly our mission, our history, and an educational approach that is relevant to the world situation today.

## A FIVE-POINT FRAMEWORK

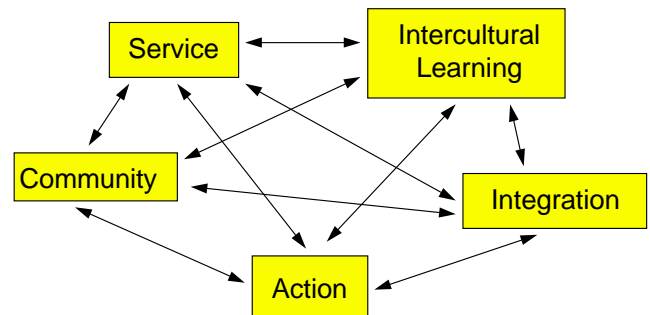
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As outlined in our mission statement, the purpose of AFS is primarily educational, but education of a particular type, toward a particular set of goals, and with a particular set of values. The education we offer is one that enables people to change their perspective through an experience that exposes them to other cultures and patterns of thought. It demands an interactive approach to learning, or learning by doing. Intercultural learning depends on this approach. More than a decade ago, we set forth a statement of our AFS Learning Objectives that brought a new level of energy to our programs.<sup>1</sup> Since then, we have been working to implement these goals in every Partner and every program. Now we are taking the next steps.

The goals we are working toward are described in the Mission Statement's Core Values and Attributes of AFS: that people act as responsible global citizens, that they work for peace and understanding, that they affirm the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures, that they respect human rights, and so on. These are exciting goals that can unite AFS organizations in the challenge of learning together how we should answer the critical concerns of people from all parts of our planet to create a more just and peaceful world.

Our Global Education Framework is based on these goals, and outlines the principles that can unite AFS programs and activities in all parts of the world.

A framework is simply an organizing structure, and in this paper we lay out five foci for this structure that should be essential components of every AFS program or activity. These are not separate components of a program or separate activities, but interlinked aspects of every program and activity that AFS offers. Each focus is described in the sections that follow.



### Focus on intercultural learning.

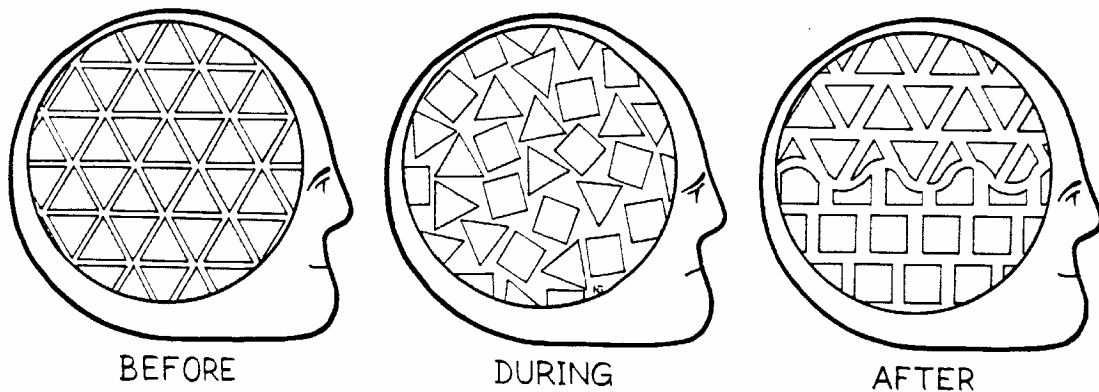
Intercultural learning is a special type of experiential learning because it focuses on the mindset of the people involved and forces them to change their perspective on the world by putting themselves in the shoes of someone from a different culture. In talking about the particular application of this concept to his own students, intercultural educator Dr. C. Peterson of the University of Minnesota describes it here:

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly referred to as the "Montréal Workshop Recommendations," these are found in the "Reports from the Workshop on Intercultural Learning Content and Quality Standards," produced by AFS Intercultural Programs in March 1984.

*“The cross-cultural or cross-class context – the context that pulls students out of familiar surroundings, that forces them to listen to other kinds of people, that forces them to deal with data that don’t fit into the way they’ve understood the world from before – creates a particularly pregnant learning moment where critical thinking is much easier if things don’t work. It’s like moving from an earth-centered view of the earth to a sun-centered view of the earth. Eventually enough pieces don’t fit, and you have to start coming up with alternative explanations. . . . The necessary cognitive dissonance for critical thinking can often be produced by cross-cultural contacts which pull out your underpinnings and force you to start over.”*

This kind of shift in perspective is the basis of intercultural learning. As Peterson goes on to explain, it is a highly emotional learning experience that requires support and mediation in order to achieve the desired results. AFS has the very successful model of intercultural learning in the Year Program. New program development in AFS should embrace, study, and support intercultural learning, because we believe that people need to change their worldview in order to create a better world. Our goal is to bring about this new perspective that builds on the knowledge gained through the experience.



### **Focus on communities.**

The fact that the population of the world is approaching six billion, most of whom will never meet or become exchange students, underscores the limitations for AFS to “change the world one person at a time” if we hope to have an impact to bring about change in the world. While continuing to appreciate the value of each individual and his or her potential to have an impact, we recognize more and more that people are more than individuals. They belong to communities and therefore we need to involve the various communities from which these individuals come and to reach into new communities that have not yet been touched by the educational benefits of AFS. When we work with schools and with communities, we multiply the potential impact of any of our programs or activities.

We also recognize that it is in the communities that our work begins. We need to develop the theories, tools, and skills to intergrate our global education goals in the context of these communities. We cannot have a global impact unless we act together and act locally.

For AFS in most countries, the first communities with which we work will be the schools. We still have much to learn about how to work within the school context to have an educational impact on the entire school community. We need to look at the models developed by others, and develop our own. In looking at our own programs and activities, we need to think about how we reach communities though local action as well as through the exchange experience. More than just connecting individuals with host families, AFS is a program that can link communities through exchanges.

In the Local Community	The Exchange Experience	In Communities Elsewhere
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AFS Preparation programs for youth.</li> <li>• Teacher seminars</li> <li>• Domestic short-term exchanges</li> <li>• Orientation activities for hosted youth</li> <li>• Visiting Teachers in the classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year Programs</li> <li>• Semester Programs</li> <li>• Intensive Programs</li> <li>• School Links</li> <li>• Team Missions</li> <li>• Teacher Exchanges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AFS Preparation programs for youth.</li> <li>• Teacher seminars</li> <li>• Domestic short-term exchanges</li> <li>• Orientation activities for hosted youth</li> <li>• Visiting Teachers in the classroom</li> </ul>

While the major portion of our effort takes place in local communities, we have paid the most attention to the impact our programs have on the individuals participating in the exchange experience. Partners around the world are developing new program components that are intended to enhance the educational impact that we know we are already having in communities and classrooms where AFS exists. As part of our global education focus, AFS is looking at new ways to assess its impact on local communities, especially in terms of these newer community-based educational initiatives.

### Focus on service and commitment.

In helping the wounded on both sides of the battlefield survive the conflicts that tore apart their nations, the AFS ambulance drivers that began our organization showed their commitment to the core AFS values, including the respect for the worth and dignity of all people, regardless of nationality. While the meaning of the name “AFS” has sometimes been problematic for the organization, the “S” continues to stand for Service for many Partners. Global citizens contribute to the world through their service to the community, to others, to the environment, and to the world. We are increasingly seeing AFS organizations making new efforts to become involved in meaningful volunteer service. This provides both an educational basis for individual participants in our various programs, but also a new source of motivation and commitment for the AFS organization, the schools, the communities, and the volunteers who want to have a larger impact on the world.

AFS is a volunteer organization because we believe it is through the participation of volunteers that we involve more people in the exercise of putting our mission into practice. Our volunteers cannot be marginal participants in our mission, but must be central to it. They are initiated in our work and values. It is therefore natural that we promote volunteer service, giving people an opportunity to join that commitment and to learn by doing.

From our worldwide research on voluntarism, we understand better that volunteering involves commitment and learning. As we build more and more on the natural links between service, our mission, and learning, the distinctions between participant and volunteer will become blurred and less important, since participants will be volunteers, and the AFS volunteers will also be “participants” learning continually through their involvement with AFS programs as well as by becoming participants in new activities such as volunteer exchanges.

## **Focus on integration and post-return.**

In many respects, what happens after an AFS program is what really matters. An AFS program should not be an isolated incident in a person’s life. The application of the lessons learned in another culture to our daily life in our local communities is our goal and our challenge. It is here where we must assess our impact. For this reason, we want to focus especially on how we support and maximize the integration of the knowledge attained through our programs.

AFS has always recognized the need for orientation as a means of maximizing the learning potential for any program. At first the emphasis was on preparation for the experience. Later we realized that during the experience students were often more receptive to understanding the nature of intercultural learning since they then had experienced some of the “dissonance” of living in another culture and had the motivation to try to understand it.

The rationale for providing orientations before and during the experience is concerned largely with supporting the students in their adjustment during the intense emotional learning experience that an AFS program can provide. Students also need a certain level of adjustment support when they return, but we are coming more and more to see the real learning and growth opportunity that exists in the post-return phase and are more interested in keeping our returnees involved in a life-long learning process. Again, we quote Peterson:

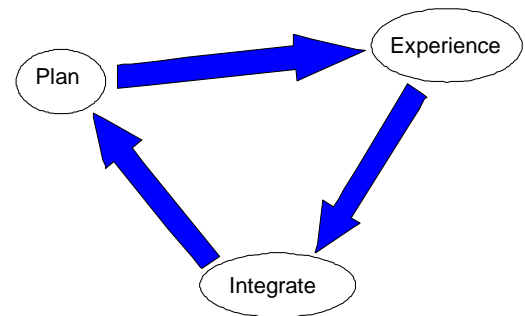
*“Re-entry is also one of those magic moments. There are very few moments where students have the capacity to learn that is as strong as it is when students are re-entering. We should not consider it as a pathology that we have to help them through, but it should be seen as a magic learning moment that we have to help students take advantage of. We should not take such a counseling approach, but look more at the opportunity for learning.”*

In emphasizing the goal to strengthen the impact of AFS, it is also important to focus on the returning participants. They are our natural constituents and a link between AFS and their own communities. By working with participants

in the post-return phase, we help them take advantage of the special knowledge and skills they possess as they look for new occasions for learning and building bridges between cultures at home.

The old AFS framework looked at post-return as the final phase of the program. With further reflection, we realize that any meaningful learning experience needs to open the mind to further learning. Rather than seeing the process as linear, ending with post-return, we instead imagine a cyclical learning process, that begins with the first connection with AFS and never stops.

We can think of the pre-departure or preparation as a planning phase for the learning experience. This experience may be the international exchange but not necessarily. Following the experience itself is a phase of integration and assessment, which should logically lead to further planning and preparation for future learning experiences.



## Focus on action and changing behavior.

While the focus on the post-return phase of the program looks at the integration of new ideas, we also stress that an active response, a change in behavior, is a critical part of the AFS approach to global education. It is learning that must be applied and put to use. We can become aware of global issues by studying them, but AFS promotes more than intellectual awareness. The intercultural learning method employed in our programs is experiential and active: “learning by doing.” Our participants do not just watch, read, or listen. They participate in another culture, they form relationships with other people, they give service to a community.

Through these actions they learn and demonstrate that learning. When our goals are the broad goals of global education, we expect AFS participants use their knowledge to “think globally, act locally.” We expect that those who participate in AFS programs will then be able to put their knowledge to work in their home communities and in their daily lives. This is one of the biggest challenges for us, but it is also the way in which an AFS Global Education can achieve meaningful progress toward our mission.

## LEARNING FOR A PURPOSE

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While the ideas embodied in these five foci are not entirely new to AFS, we also as an organization are going through a paradigm shift by using this five-point framework as our perspective on our work. As we develop new programs, they will be built within this framework toward the goal of bringing about our mission.

In our mission statement, we state that AFS provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understand-

ing needed to create a more just and peaceful world. When we articulate clearly the educational impact we expect to achieve through our program, we show how AFS is distinct from other types of travel or study-abroad programs.

There are countless issues of worldwide importance, including poverty, racism, environmental degradation, wars and ethnic conflicts, and abuses of human rights. AFS as an organization is not an expert in these issues, nor does it advocate a particular viewpoint or solution to these questions that concern us all. Yet if we want to ensure that the programs AFS organizes in the next century will bring about a better world and create responsible, global citizens, we need to start finding ways to ensure that AFS educates people in ways that impel them to think about the global implications of their own actions. We want to be an organization that helps develop a sense of commitment and responsibility to the entire world and its people.

### **Fitting in with existing educational philosophies: Denmark.**

While all AFS Partners will want to work within the same overall educational framework, each Partner must also explain and develop the framework and the mission of the organization in terms that make sense in the local cultural and educational context. In Denmark, Dansk AFS has worked within the context of the educational philosophy of N.F.S. Grundtvig, which prompts them to use a term more closely translated in English as “global enlightenment” instead of global education. In this concept, the importance of linking “light” with “life” is stressed. In the past, AFS has focused more on life than on light; now we must show how these are inter-related and how global enlightenment can be achieved through this connection.

<b>Lys (light)</b>	<b>OPLYSNING</b>	<b>Liv (life)</b>
Intellectual: Book learning	<b>“Enlightenment”</b>	Emotional: Experience learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•brain</li> <li>•head</li> <li>•understanding</li> <li>•community/global perspective</li> <li>•large perspective</li> <li>•the learned (teacher, academics)</li> </ul>	(When both sides are linked, the result is school for life. If not, it is school for death.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•body</li> <li>•heart</li> <li>•experience</li> <li>•individual perspective</li> <li>•micro perspective</li> <li>•the people (the common person)</li> </ul>

### **A unified approach rather than added components.**

In developing an educational framework for all AFS programs and activities, it is important that there be coherence and unity in how we frame the concepts and activities that are included in our effort. We recognize the danger of merely “adding” new elements to AFS programs, increasing the burden of service delivery on both the volunteers and staff. But in looking to develop a new Global Education Framework to connect our programs and activities, we need to identify new organizing principles that will ultimately change the way we think about and operate our programs.

When we focus on communities, we cannot maintain the perspective that involves a community by attempting to recruit each individual within it, and then on top of that, adding some type of “community” component. We need instead to develop a comprehensive approach that achieves our goals. Similarly, in focusing on service and commitment, we will run into trouble if we approach this as a new recruitment and placement problem: an additional component of the placement for each participant. We must instead use the focus on service as a tool to attract participation and build stronger and more effective programs.

More and more we will be thinking of AFS as a program package for the schools and the educational communities in which we work. The AFS program will not only be the exchange of relatively few students or teachers, but the integration of global education activities involving entire schools and communities that are linked in the AFS network and through exchange programs.

## **Implications for AFS programs.**

Several AFS Partners have begun to develop Global Education Programs that unite AFS activities and programs through a consistent and coherent educational approach. These programs look for ways to develop a stronger intercultural and global education content in the classroom by working with teachers and schools to promote our common educational goals. The AFS exchange program, the presence of hosted students, candidates, teachers, and returnees can provide a useful and logical starting point for introducing new concepts about other cultures and realities.

In many countries, schools and educators are now moving outside the classroom to provide their students with valuable educational experiences that engage them in various types of community service. As a long-time champion of experiential education, AFS organizations in some of these countries are working in this direction, finding ways to involve hosted AFS participants, young people interested in AFS exchanges, and AFS returnees in service programs and projects that prepare them to assume responsibilities as citizens in their own communities and as members of a global society. The year-long preparation program of many AFS organizations in Latin America, in which AFS candidates participate in community service and other activities, is one such model.

While each Partner will have its own educational package, the AFS Global Education Program should include a number of interlinked activities which together would multiply the impact of AFS and promote its goals and mission.

### ***One example.***

Our Spanish organization, Intercultura Spain, has developed a model that begins with a small working group of secondary school teachers from various parts of the country who are involved from the outset in the development of the package of interlinked AFS global education activities. As a group, these teachers assume the responsibility for managing the program. They

maintain contact and work with community organizations so that the program's school activities can be linked with community service action.

After this preliminary planning stage, the actual first phase of the Global Education Program is a training seminar for volunteer teachers, developed by Intercultura in conjunction with selected NGOs and community organizations. Written materials are developed for this stage to help teachers bring back the information content to their own classrooms.

The second phase takes place in classrooms throughout Spain as the concepts of global education are introduced to students as part of the curriculum or as a school club activity. This phase adds global education content to the preparation of the group for the exchange program abroad or within Spain. While not all students travel, all receive a valuable educational program.

The third phase is the exchanges themselves, which are to be planned according to one of three specific global education content themes, and which will include a component of community service and commitment. Teachers also have the opportunity for furthering their education through an educators' exchange with a particular thematic component.

A fourth phase would be the integration and application of the learning achieved during the exchange phase, and the development of a body of material and publicity that can be used to further develop the Global Education Program and involve an even greater number of people.

### ***Other possibilities.***

Some general elements that could be nicely integrated into a Global Education package include the following:

- **AFS school clubs and school links.** The school club can be a central focus for community-based global education activities offered by AFS. The clubs involve students at a young age, introducing and exposing them through short-term encounters and ongoing school activities to intercultural learning, global issues, etc. Clubs are a main source for recruiting students for outbound Year, Semester, and Intensive Program exchanges and for finding placements for hosted students on these programs.
- **The traditional Year (or Semester) Program.** Secondary schools that participate in AFS also send and host on the traditional program, which involves using the exchange participants (sent and hosted) as resources in the classroom. This program involves the entire school community in all aspects of the program, from recruitment and selection of students for the YP, placement and support for hosted students, and integration and evaluation programs for returnees. The exchange program provides incentives for teachers across academic disciplines to address themes related to intercultural learning and global education and to the study of the specific countries and cultures represented in the sending and hosting programs.
- **Intensive Programs and group exchanges.** More and more AFS Partners are developing thematic educational programs involving a shorter-

term intercultural exchange in another country or within the same country. Schools may select intensive programs that best suit the educational needs of their students and faculty, and involve those in the exchange as classroom resources.

- **Community connections.** AFS programs can be linked to the community through service projects involving AFS club members. AFS can assist school clubs in connecting with other NGOs that can offer service projects relevant to the mission and purpose of AFS as well as to the special needs within each nation and community. Schools can use the community service activities as field research opportunities for the students, involving a variety of academic subjects.

AFS returnees and others could also volunteer to work on educational projects with AFS and schools to link the content of the classroom to real-life situations, issues, and concerns in the community. These projects would be part of the support provided to hosted students but beneficial to the entire classroom because these AFS volunteers help teach young people about their own community, its local businesses, its political structure, its service organizations, its legal system, etc.

- **Teacher Programs.** Schools in developed countries are increasingly faced with a diverse student body in the classroom, posing new challenges for teachers. Schools may elect to send their teachers on short-term programs to developing countries where they can gain the direct exposure to these countries and cultures and explore the variety of teaching methods and philosophies employed in other parts of the world. Schools may also host teachers from targeted developing countries, providing the school with a new expertise while also giving students the experience of a different style of teaching. There are also clear benefits for the hosted teacher and for schools in developing countries that receive teachers on short-term programs. AFS may also offer teacher training seminars that do not involve travel.

**Materials and curriculum resources.** AFS can help schools develop global education curriculum projects and help schools find appropriate materials for the development of a global education content within the classroom. AFS Partners would not necessarily produce their own materials but could help schools and local community groups locate appropriate resources, and assist schools in sharing these resources with other schools in their own country and worldwide through the AFS network. As we further develop our access to global communications technology, we can also be on the forefront of linking AFS schools to global resources and materials.

The critical part of any AFS Global Education package is a unified approach, grounded in the Global Education Framework and involving the school as the primary participant, with a broader educational impact that reaches those who never have the opportunity to leave their own community. The method should be to involve everyone in the school and community in the exchange process, not just the individual students or teachers sent and hosted, and the families who host them.