

## AN EAA INTERVIEW WITH CARYN STEDMAN

EAA editorial board member Caryn Stedman is the Curriculum and Instructional Specialist for Global/International Studies at the Metropolitan Learning Center in Bloomfield, Connecticut. Caryn, who formerly was the East Asian Studies Outreach Director at Yale University, is a national leader in Asian Studies and international education. In 2004, Caryn's school won a prestigious Goldman Sachs Award for International Education. In the same year, Caryn also won the National Council for the Social Studies Award for Global Understanding. Former NCSS President Tedd Levy discusses both Asian studies and international education with Caryn in the following interview.



**Tedd:** Caryn, could you tell us a little about how you first became interested in Asia and international education?

**Caryn:** Well, my maternal grandfather had been in China and we had furniture that came from China in our house. I remember spending time as a child examining the scenes on a large carved chest and wondering what they were. My father had been in Korea and Japan and had a fondness for Japan. My mother was born in Panama. My parents had friends from around the world, and being around people with different points of reference just seemed to translate into an academic interest in understanding the world. And, I had a great Chinese language teacher in college who really inspired me to pursue East Asian Studies.

**Tedd:** Could you tell us about your teaching responsibilities and your students?

**Caryn:** I teach AP World History, World Religions, and East Asian Studies in an eighty-minute, five-day block, plus a homeroom and study hall. I have eighteen students in my AP World History class. By the way, any student who wants to take an AP class may do so. Eighty-seven percent of my class last year passed the APWH exam.

I am also the curriculum specialist, and my job is to ensure that our entire curriculum reflects our international theme. I also plan the annual International Exchange Fair, arrange for home-stay families for our international students, write grant proposals, and assist in fundraising for international exchanges. I advise the International Education Week, the National Honor Society, the Model UN, and Geography Clubs.

**Tedd:** What is the student population of your school?

**Caryn:** We have nearly 700 students in grades 6–12 in a desegregation magnet school that accepts students through a lottery. The demographic breakdown is about 60 percent Black/African American, 24 percent White, 11 percent Hispanic/Latino, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1 percent Native American/American Indian.

**Tedd:** Why do you think it is important to promote a global education?

**Caryn:** There is a lot of talk in policy circles about the so-called “achievement gap,” but no one talks about the real issue—the opportunity gap. Students in schools with resources have opportunities to learn world languages, to study abroad, to host international students, to engage in integrated, high interest, international curricula that helps them to understand the complexities of the world in a way that will ensure their success. Other students—far too many—are penalized and denied these opportunities because they or their classmates

have not “achieved” to a preset standard in a very narrow set of skills and thus are condemned to a test-prep, drill-and-kill curriculum that will do nothing to ensure that they have the real skills—world language, interdisciplinary connections, broad global understandings, international interpersonal skills—that will ensure their success.

Those who established our school recognized this and designed a school that makes these opportunities available for all students. They understand that we need to close the opportunity gap, because that is the only way the “achievement gap” will be closed.

**Tedd:** How is the curriculum organized so that students understand these perspectives?

**Caryn:** In the middle school, students in all three grades approach their understandings through a series of eight systems-based case studies. For example, they study health and pollution issues by looking at statistics, doing graphs, and examining the causes of the problem. They read a novel, write letters to legislators, and compile statistics. They use scientific inquiry, math, literacy, social studies, and health to do what people do in the real world—synthesize their skills and knowledge in a meaningful way.

The high school curriculum is more discipline-bound, largely because of state requirements. All students must take three years of a world language and pass an oral exam to graduate. All students take a two-year interdisciplinary course called “Global and International Studies” and area studies seminars. Our three-year language arts and social studies sequences are interdisciplinary and global.

**Tedd:** What sources seem to be especially helpful for teaching about Asia?

**Caryn:** The Internet has made it much easier for teachers to access materials on Asia or other world areas. Sites such as the Asia for Educators from the East Asia Center at Columbia University or Ask Asia at the Asia Society are especially useful. Of course, the activities published here in *Education About Asia* as well as the resource lists and links are enormously helpful. I use many of the excellent materials published by such organizations as SPICE, the Rocky Mountain Consortium, The Center for Teaching International Relations at the University of Denver, the Five College Center for East Asian Studies, and others. University-based outreach programs are a great source of activities as well as opportunities for educators.

Two organizations that have helped our students connect and communicate with students in other countries are iEARN ([www.iearn.org](http://www.iearn.org)) and Global Nomads (<http://www.gng.org/>), both of which create student-to-student projects. Global Nomads set up two

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## Women and Gender Relations

edited by  
**Susan  
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**RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT ASIA**

live teleconferences for my students and students in Baghdad to talk on the eve of the US action in Iraq and again after the fall of Baghdad. Some students are still communicating and one of the Iraqi students visited our school in October.

**Tedd:** *What have been the reactions of students to these activities? How can you be sure they are learning what you want them to learn?*

**Caryn:** Our students are adept at electronic research and communication, capable of multitasking, and expect activities that reflect the fast-paced world of computers. Our job is to reach them at this level and bring them along to the understandings we have identified as important. And, I always design my lessons with goals that include higher-level thinking skills and activities. Our assessments measure student achievement based on those goals.

**Tedd:** *Have you adjusted your curriculum or teaching to meet state standards? How have students done on standardized tests?*

**Caryn:** We're fortunate in Connecticut to have standards that focus on real-life applications and higher level thinking skills. We have added a course to meet the new state requirement for civics, which examines the emergence of civil society as a global system. The Connecticut standardized tests also assess the application of knowledge and higher level thinking skills so that students who engage in our curriculum do well, especially by the time they reach high school. We weave the test-type of tasks into our curriculum but we do not "teach to the test."

On last year's standardized tests, 93 percent of our high school students scored at the NCLB level of proficient or higher in reading, 98 percent did so in writing; 76 percent did so in math, and 91 percent did so in science.

**Tedd:** *We understand that parents have been very supportive of your school. In what ways have they and other members of the community been involved?*

**Caryn:** We have a very active PTO that is fully supportive of our international/global theme. We will be hosting a group of students from Egypt and we had twice as many families volunteer to host as we needed. We also have partnerships with many businesses in the Greater Hartford area as well as with several colleges and universities for our students to take courses and summer programs.

**Tedd:** *What suggestions would you have for others wanting to strengthen their own curriculum for Asia and the world?*

**Caryn:** I would recommend keeping the big picture in mind—what is good for the students. A very wise and wonderful former principal, Dr. Suzanne D'Annolfo, is fond of saying "Schools are for kids, they are not employment agencies for adults." We need to prepare our students for the fast paced, diverse, multi-lingual, global future that will be theirs, not the comfortable, if somewhat inward looking and provincial past that was ours, regardless of what standardized tests measure.

Educators need to understand that enriching the curriculum to close the opportunity gap with a challenging, international curriculum raises student achievement.

**Tedd:** *Thank you, Caryn.* ■

**TEDD LEVY** is Seminar Leader for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia's Connecticut Seminar on East Asia. A former president of the National Council for the Social Studies, he is currently an educational consultant and freelance writer. He has known Caryn and admired her work and accomplishments for many years.