

Does Africa Have a Future?

Activity developed at Cégep de Ste-Foy

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The activity is part of the second biology course offered in the third term of the *Arts and Sciences* program. Two articles published in *Scientific American* in May and June 2000 serve as a springboard for this scenario. During the assignment sessions, the group of 21 students is divided into four smaller groups of experts. These groups participate in a simulated international conference on the AIDS epidemic in Africa, like the one held in South Africa in the spring of 2000. **Representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO)** discuss how this terrible disease has evolved worldwide. **Scientists** from the biomedical field explain how the HIV virus functions and how the disease evolves. **Representatives of the pharmaceutical industry** present the various antiretroviral drugs that they manufacture, the advantages and disadvantages of tritherapy and their efforts to develop a vaccine. Finally, representatives of **nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** describe the situation in Africa, the means that have been put in place to halt the progression of the disease in Africa and the problems encountered. After this hour of presentations, the groups of experts must write a joint declaration of two to five pages to confront this dramatic situation, while taking into account the interests and limitations of each group.

This activity is part of a massive trend in educational innovation in the Natural Science program¹. It aims more specifically at moving the teaching of science away from academics and focusing more on teaching students to use their previously acquired knowledge and the scientific approach. The aim of this trend is to lead students to better confront “real-life” problems. This activity encourages students to take an active role in their learning, to apply the scientific process in teams when carrying out their investigations and to synthesize their results. They will have to call upon their knowledge and experience. Like members of the scientific community, they will have to write a report and defend their points of view to their peers in order to reach a consensus (Waterman, M.A., 1998²).

¹ For more information, visit the Web site of the University of Buffalo at <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/cases/case.html>.

² For more information, you can view the PowerPoint presentation on the educational approach used for this activity at <http://ici.cegep-ste-foy.qc.ca/profs/jpsabourin/cas.htm>