


CORRECTED VERSION

Reflection on what is implied by 'international' with reference to international education and international schools.

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Background

According to Leach (1969) cited in Cambridge & Thompson (2004) nationalism can be considered to be one of the greatest dividers of humankind and Blackburn (1991) cited in Cambridge & Thompson (2004, P.163), proposed that "education must be used as a tool to breakdown the barriers of race, religion and class which separate our students." According to Walker (2000) there is currently an emphasis on education as the essential vehicle for citizenship and responsible parenthood and that education is now less about national identity, stating that of the 188 different countries that belong to the United Nations only about 20 have claim to be 'nation states' as these are only ones that contain within their boundaries people of common descent, language and history (Walker 2000). Hence the indication of this is that international education is important for all and that there could be lessons to be learned from it. Ultimately, Walker (2000 P.202) believes:

 International education celebrates diversity and ensures that every act, every symbol, every exchange involving teachers, administrators, students and parents reinforces the belief that, in the end, human diversity is an enrichment and source of strength.

What it Means to 'Be International'


This paper will now examine what is meant by the word 'international' and the related terms internationalist, internationalism and international-mindedness. These terms are widely used in mission statements by both national and international schools, but as past research shows, unsurprisingly, they do not necessarily have one clear meaning. For example, McKenzie (1998) cited in Hayden et al. (2000, P.107) argues that the word "international" in international schools is used with 5 different meanings.

Non-national (not subject to the requirements or standards of any particular national education system), pan-national (seeking to build bridges between countries), ex-national (in the sense of internationally mobile expatriates), multi-national (as in the context of curriculum, which draws from a number of national education systems) and trans-national (in the sense that it leads to a certificate which allows students to 'cross educational borders with the same ease that a valid passport permits movement from one country to another').



Leach (1969) cited in Cambridge & Thompson (2004, P.164) takes a slightly different approach and suggests that there are three different approaches to the application of internationalism in the field of education:



1. unilateral internationalism, such as a country concerned chiefly with the education of its own personnel away from home in a different country.
2. bilateral internationalism, such as exchange between and among students of two countries; and
3. multilateral internationalism, requiring funding from at least three national sources, no one of them dominant.

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 Hayden et al. (2000) found that in the questionnaire used in their research that a positive response to the question 'in order to be international it is necessary not to be narrow minded' is rated most highly by students and in the top three for teachers.

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 Cambridge & Thompson (2004) propose that 'being international', as currently practised, is the reconciliation of a dilemma between ideological and pragmatic interests. The ideological 'internationalist' current of international education may be identified with a progressive view of education that is concerned with the moral development of the individual by attempting to influence the formation of positive attitudes towards peace,  international understanding and responsible world citizenship. Cambridge & Thompson (2004, P. 167) who state: "International education may be viewed as a means of changing the world by increasing international understanding through bringing young people together from many different countries." The pragmatic 'globalist' current of international education may be identified with the process of economic and cultural globalisation, expressed in terms of satisfying the increasing demands for educational qualifications that are portable between schools and transferable between education systems and the spread of global quality standards through quality assurance processes such as accreditation.

In the research by  Hayden & Thompson (1998) they claim that the more 'ideologically based' dimensions of an international curriculum such as tolerance, considering issues from more than one perspective and that all cultures are equally valid were considered important by the respondents of their research. These are all attributes that should influence students to have positive attitudes towards other cultures, but do not necessarily stem from the student population or from the curriculum. This is backed up by the quote: "Both students and teachers appear to believe that it is possible to be firmly rooted in one national system and culture with strong individual views and yet still be international." There is an immediate indication  from this that an international school is as much defined by its philosophy as by its physical attributes (Hayden et al. 2000, P. 113).

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