

Education: For the Nation or for the World?

By George Walker, Director General Emeritus, The International Baccalaureate

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Defining national frontiers

For the past 150 years, education has been linked to a national purpose. In my own country (the UK) the priority in the 19th century was the education of a newly franchised population to cast its votes responsibly; in the United States, Horace Mann, the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, saw education as the most effective means to reduce poverty. More recently, when Singapore was created in 1965 its government quite deliberately designed a style of education that would help to shape a new national identity. African countries gaining independence in the 1960s and '70s used education as a means of re-shaping their national identity and casting aside the influence of the colonial power.

However, the biggest national driver has been economic and the proven link between the quality of education and per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In a recent report the World Bank insisted that it was the acquisition of skills, particularly literacy, that measured GDP increases rather than the length of the educational process but, whatever the detail, no government dares ignore the broad relationship between education and economic prosperity. No wonder, then, that developed nations examine the outcomes of the PISA exercise (Programme of International Student Assessment, administered by OECD and involving nearly 40 different countries) very carefully indeed and ask, yet again, what is the secret of Finland's success?

Former US Education Secretary, Rod Paige, commented in 2004:

The PISA results are a blinking warning light

But he was only echoing a much more dramatic warning contained in the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (*A Nation at Risk*):

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

The economic imperative is important and Thomas Friedman in his best-selling book *The World is Flat* has linked the impending decline of the United States to its inadequate system of public education.

A more powerful argument still for education remaining a national responsibility is its central role in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. Decisions about who should teach, what

they should teach and how they should teach it lie at the heart of cultural transmission. Whose view will determine the nation's future needs? Which selected elements of the nation's culture? What style of learning? These questions have occupied the greatest minds and have provided some of the most inspiring statements about education and learning. It is at this point that education becomes worth studying!

Education has always been perceived as a national responsibility - more than that, as a national priority. This has been not only for pragmatic reasons, in particular to sustain economic growth, but also because education has been the means of defining, debating and maintaining a nation's culture and therefore its very sense of identity.

Anyone who believes that education has little effect and that it all comes to the same thing in the end should read the classic study of the 1970s by the Cornell psychologist; Urie Bronfenbrenner entitled *Two Worlds of Childhood* in which he examines the hugely different experiences of childhood in America and the Soviet Union. Incidentally, Bronfenbrenner looks for a criterion for judging the worth of a society that goes beyond GDP, crime rates or health statistics and he proposes: *the concern of one generation for the next*. I think I may come back to that in a moment.

Thinking across frontiers

There have, however, always been those whose intellectual curiosity and breadth of vision has carried them across the frontiers of their own nation. The French essayist, Montaigne, wrote in 1580:

Mixing with the world has a marvellously clarifying effect on a man's judgement. We are all confined and pent up within ourselves, and our sight has contracted to the length of our noses. When someone asked Socrates of what country he was he did not reply 'of Athens,' but 'of the world.'

This great world, which some still reckon to be but one example of a whole genus, is the mirror into which we must look if we are to behold ourselves from the proper standpoint.

The Ancient Greeks had developed a similar view and it was indeed the skeptic, Diogenes, who first used the term 'cosmopolitan,' meaning a citizen of the world. Five centuries later, the Roman statesman, Seneca, insisted that education must develop within us a sense of belonging both to a world community and to the community of our birth.

Now, when Socrates, Diogenes, Seneca and even 16th century Montaigne speak of 'the world' we need to be careful because their world is very different from the one we perceive today. Nonetheless, their essential message remains unchanged over two and a half millennia, namely we understand ourselves better in relation to other people who think and behave differently to ourselves. We were created to be part of diversity.

This concept of what we might now call 'global citizenship' is not without its critics, particularly here in the United States. Perhaps fearful of some historically dubious champions of cosmopolitanism, some believe that global citizenship and American citizenship simply cannot co-exist. Well, that is a reassuring and uncomplicated view. Alas, real life is rather more complex and I have chosen an example to illustrate that complexity.

Any list of founders of international education and the closely associated United World College movement and the IB, would certainly include the name of Kurt Hahn. Hahn was Jewish and helped to found Salem School in Germany, which is today an IB school. In 1933, after being arrested by the Nazis, he fled to Britain where he founded Gordonstoun School and launched the Outward Bound movement. In the 1950's he was a key member of the group that founded Atlantic College, the first of the United World Colleges.

Hahn's message was simple:

There will be no indoctrination—but through the bond of active humanity a brotherhood will find itself alive to the common purpose.

However, the motivation that lay behind the foundation of Atlantic College was not quite so straightforward. In 1957, Hahn wrote:

The North Atlantic Powers have built up a formidable alliance (NATO) to deter aggression. To succeed in their purpose they must instil into the citizens of the 15 Member Nations a sense of unity and resolution sufficient to inspire them to work positively for peace as well as defensively against the threat of war...The enemies of the West cannot fail to appreciate that, as soon as they can lull their victims into a false sense of security, old discords will break out again and will cripple the potentiality of the Alliance for concerted action...We want to submit a plan to build western solidarity on a more reliable basis than fear: namely on the resolution of young people, strong in their belief in the common cause of the free world...

These are not exactly the politically correct words of a global citizen, and they even resonate with recent statements coming from the White House on the spread of Western values linked to the concept of democracy. I do not quote them in order to cast doubt on Kurt Hahn's international credentials; someone who knew him well described his patriotism as starting with a concern for a service to the local community, spreading out to one's own country and ending in 'tender love of all mankind.' No: I have chosen Hahn to show how there is usually an overlapping of thought and action when one tries to distinguish the national from the international; we have to learn to live with both. You will all have heard the expression, 'think globally and act locally.'

In summary, therefore, of this second section, I have tried to show that there have always been people ready to think beyond national frontiers in order to imagine things from a different perspective. That does not require anyone to surrender their national identity and culture, but rather to take notice of the identity and culture of others. My message is that this is no longer an intellectual whim for a minority, but a practical necessity for us all.

Education across frontiers

Am I on my own? Well, a number of messages coming from US administrations in recent years suggest not.

In 2000, the then Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, said

I strongly believe that the growth of democracy, economic prosperity and economic stability throughout the world is linked to the advance of education. This is one of the reasons why the United States should have an active and strong international education agenda.

His successor, in the new Republican administration, Rod Paige, making specific reference to the events of September 11 2001 and noting that an astonishing 83% of young Americans surveyed by the National Geographic could not find Afghanistan on a map, said:

No longer can we afford to focus only on the domestic. Our view must turn more outward towards the world, nurturing relationships with other countries and improving international studies in our schools.

I am directing that we do a better job of exposing our students in this country to other languages, cultures, and challenges outside our borders.

Paige's successor, Margaret Spellings, addressed the US University Presidents Summit on International Education in January of this year

The world is changing at a rapid pace, and many of our students lack the skills to succeed in the global knowledge economy... This is not just an education issue; it's an economic issue, a civic issue, a social issue, a national security issue, and it's everybody's issue.

and President Bush, at the same conference, developed this theme

This initiative is a broad-gauged initiative that deals with the defence of the country, the diplomacy of the country, the intelligence to defend our country and the education of our people.

But then, quite unexpectedly, the President said something which transforms the entire debate and, in a way, becomes the pivot which tips the balance of my lecture. He said:

Learning a language—somebody else's language— is a kind gesture. It's a gesture of interest. It really is a fundamental way to reach out to somebody and say, 'I care about you. I want you to know that I am interested in not only how you talk but how you live.'

Quite suddenly, our attention is no longer focused on economics and international diplomacy, not even on democracy and the defence of the country. It has gone much deeper: the fundamental challenge is to understand how other people communicate and how other people live their lives. We are beginning to hear the language of global citizenship.

In that statement, President Bush has associated himself with Charles Dickens who supported the establishment of a consortium of international schools throughout Europe in the 1860s, insisting that such schools would encourage

the tolerance that comes of near acquaintance with different ways of thought

and with the Indian poet and Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, who founded an international school in India in 1921 based on a similar philosophy. Tagore wrote

When races come together, as in the present age, it should not be merely the gathering of a crowd; there must be a bond of relation or they will collide with each other...

This growing movement of what we might call 'education across frontiers' established its first enduring roots in 1924 when the International School of Geneva was founded to educate the children of the staff of the League of Nations. The League declined any formal responsibility for education, but a group of its staff was quick to launch a school that would encourage in its diverse students the same values that the League was trying to instil in its diverse member nations. Today, Ecolint, as it is known across the world, educates some 3,500 students on the basis that

The activity of the school in all fields and especially in the field of pedagogy shall be based on the principles of equality and solidarity among all peoples and of the equal value of all human beings without the distinction of nationality, race, sex, language or religion

This movement of—let us now use the accepted name of international education—gathered momentum after the Second World War.

For the past 150 years there has been a growing movement of international education that is concerned with understanding people from different cultures not just as economic competitors or potential threats to our security, but as fellow human beings with the same rights as we have to live peaceful and fulfilled lives on this planet.

International education recognizes diversity as a cause for celebration; it also recognizes our common humanity as the basis for sharing the planet's resources. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, globalization makes it meaningless to speak of 'my world' and 'their world.' We are all living together in 'our world' and our education must reflect that reality.

Schools across frontiers

A moment ago I spoke about introducing ‘an international dimension to programmes of education.’ But what does that actually mean in practice? What am I suggesting schools should be doing differently next Monday morning?

Well already, I imagine, good schools are encouraging their students to think creatively and not merely to regurgitate undigested information; already they are challenging their students to solve problems that require the application of more than one knowledge discipline; already they are devising learning tasks that require cooperation, collaboration and teamwork; and they are creating opportunities to use different modes of communication including a foreign language.

Let us— optimistically, perhaps—take all that for granted. I believe there are two important additional requirements: a study of globalization itself and a raising of cultural awareness. I do not have time to explore either in detail so let me make just two broad points.

I understand the term ‘globalization’ to mean more than the movement of different forms of capital around the world; more than the rapid transfer of information. I understand it to embrace those activities which can only be studied meaningfully from a global, rather than a national, perspective. So, for me, ‘globalization’ includes the steady environmental degradation of our planet, it includes the management of disease, it includes human migration and it includes a knowledge of and respect for the organizations that are trying to manage the impact of globalization, particularly on those people who are least able to manage it themselves.

Concerning cultural awareness, I would make just one point. If I am to respect another person’s culture then I must start by understanding and respecting my own; its rituals, symbols and heroes; the importance of a shared language and of a shared religion. I can only make sense of my everyday life through a shared cultural identity with those around me. I was reminded recently of the complexity of this subject while reading Toni Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Eleven-year-old Pecola, abused by her father, is desperate to acquire the blue eyes of a white child because, for her, they represent true beauty, in contrast, she is convinced, to her own racially-determined ugliness. How can Pecola be helped to understand and respect her own culture? What sort of view is Pecola going to take of the white culture that surrounds her when it is measured against her own racial self-loathing?

So far, as I am sure you have noticed, I have made only passing reference to the International Baccalaureate. That is deliberate because today’s theme is bigger, much bigger, than any particular programme of education. However, in the few minutes that remain I am going to use one of the IB’s programmes to illustrate some of the points I have been making. I have chosen the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), designed for students who are in that critical period of adolescence from ages roughly 11 to 16. Again, this is not an appropriate moment to go into detail, but I want to highlight four key factors in that programme which is now being taught in 500 schools in more than 60 different countries:

1. It requires study in eight areas of learning: the mother tongue, a foreign language, maths, science, humanities, technology, physical education and the arts. Global citizens need to develop well-honed academic skills—to use Thomas Friedman’s description: they need business school minds coupled to social worker hearts.

2. However, each of these eight disciplines is not studied in isolation. Five so-called 'areas of interaction' bring them together: approaches to learning, community and service, homo faber (why and how we create and what are the circumstances), the environment, and health and social education. In other words the disciplinary learning is focused through the areas of interaction on issues that directly relate to the students' lives.
3. Each student is required to complete a personal project as the culmination of a sustained involvement with the areas of interaction and requiring (as Kurt Hahn would have put it) "victorious patience and tenacity of effort – carried through to a well defined end and designed to tap the hidden reserves of intellect and will."
4. The overarching themes of cultural awareness and communication are present as a constant reminder in the teachers' guides to the programme.

The Middle Years Programme is essentially a framework within which different content, different emphases and different national traditions can be accommodated. The MYP that I have seen in Binghamton, taught of course in English, is different to the MYP I have seen in Beijing, taught in Chinese, but they are recognisably the same programme, based on the same values and using the same guidelines. It is prescriptive in one important sense: it requires students and teachers to look beyond the horizons of their own cultural experience. It does not, however, seek to replace or to undermine that experience but to use it as a starting point in the quest that President Bush described so well in that sentence

I want you to know that I am interested in not only how you talk but how you live.

In conclusion I return to my lecture's title which poses the question *Education: for the nation or for the world?* I hope by now that I have persuaded you that the title needs two changes: first by replacing *or* by *and* second by removing the question mark. Let it become *Education: for the nation and for the world*. We have no choice. Whether or not it is our individual human instinct to reach out to others, or to be fearful of others reaching out to us, the impact of globalization means that neither process can be stopped, still less reversed.

To remind you of Bronfenbrenner's definition, we are dealing with the *concern of one generation for the next*. Our children and our grandchildren will always live in a globalized world and their education must equip them with appropriate knowledge, skills and values as best we can currently describe them.

Let me then finish with the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave... Mine is not a religion of the prison-house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolence, pride of race, religion or colour.