

Curriculum development and ethics in international education

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The Great War of 1914–1918 demonstrated in a terrible manner the way in which nations were distrustful and intolerant of each other. In the uneasy peace of the 1920s and 1930s, national leaders began the first tentative steps towards global co-operation. The International Labour Office and the League of Nations were established in 1919 and 1920 respectively, with their headquarters in Geneva and staff drawn from many countries. There was a need for a school which would cater for children with a diversity of languages and cultures, a school which could prepare them for university education in their home countries. So it was that in 1924 the International School of Geneva was founded by a group of parents predominantly from the League of Nations and the International Labour Office. The parents, motivated by a belief in the objectives of the organizations they served, wanted a school which would give the child:

a complete and rounded view of the world which was the workshop of his parents; not only the view, but the knowledge and understanding; not only knowledge, but the love and the desire for peace, the feeling of the brotherhood of man.¹

This was the first international school. The United Nations International School (UNIS) in New York, founded in 1947, espoused the same philosophy as did the first of the United World Colleges, Atlantic College, founded in 1962 in Wales, which deliberately united young people from many different countries to be educated and grow together. Many other international schools emerged from 1924, initially for the utilitarian purpose of serving the rapidly expanding population of students residing in countries other than that of their first nationality, but there was at least a hint of ideology for a better world which grew in importance. It was in these multicultural schools, above all, that the seeds of peaceful coexistence and international understanding should be nurtured and developed.

After the Second World War international education exchanges between the United States, Europe and the Middle East occurred. The Government of the United States launched itself into 'bilateral internationalism' by supporting student exchanges—particularly at the university level. Many foreign students studied at universities and colleges in the United States and the 1946 Fulbright Act allowed many Americans to study overseas.² In 1950 UNESCO sponsored teacher exchanges

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across the world and its Associated Schools Project linked children and teachers across cultures. These factors contributed to cross-cultural exchanges whose major objective was to learn to understand people of other nations by living and working with them.

With the advent of international schools and their population of students from diverse cultures came a curriculum problem. Teachers were concerned about the inappropriateness of national curricula for providing a truly global dimension and international experience in the academic programme. The informal relationships between culturally diverse individuals in an international school setting should be enhanced by formal recognition in the academic subjects, methodological approaches and international comparisons which would enable individuals to see their own cultural identity in relation to the rest of the world. And so, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) was developed appropriately and largely by the staff of the first of the international schools during the 1960s with the first official examinations in 1971. (Two other international programmes are now offered: since 1992 the Middle Years Programme for students from 11 to 16 years of age, and since 1997 the Primary Years Programme for children from 3 to 11/12 years of age.) UNESCO provided financial and moral support for the development of international curricula until the mid-1970s. Although the programme was originally intended for the internationally mobile student population, a number of national ministries of education have since implemented the IBDP in some state schools (now representing 45% of the current 2,050 schools) in an attempt to internationalize their education systems.

The philosophy of the IBDP

The ethical underpinning of the programme is captured in the mission statement of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) officially founded in 1968 in Geneva.

Through comprehensive and balanced curricula coupled with challenging assessments, the International Baccalaureate Organization aims to assist schools in their endeavours to develop the individual talents of young people and teach them to relate the experience of the classroom to the realities of the world outside. Beyond intellectual rigour and high academic standards, strong emphasis is placed on the ideals of international understanding and responsible citizenship, to the end that IB students may become critical and compassionate thinkers, lifelong learners and informed participants in local and world affairs, conscious of the shared humanity that binds all people together while respecting the variety of cultures and attitudes that makes for the richness of life.

This text has many similarities with UNESCO's description of international education.³ The IBO seeks to develop citizens of the world who:

- are aware of global issues (such as world peace and environmental concerns);
- appreciate, respect and understand other cultures; and
- have an understanding of and respect for the human condition in all its manifestations.

The world is interdependent in many ways as it has never been before: the economy, labour market, technology, research, arts, politics, communication, travel, transmission of culture, human rights, genetics, natural disasters, armed conflicts, the protection of natural resources. Intercultural understanding assists the appreciation of global issues and the human condition. It helps to explore

questions such as: what are the cultural reasons for that government not legislating to control damage to the ozone layer? How does a particular ethnic group or nation look after its elderly, the street children, the poor, the disabled, the immigrants? It also assists responsible citizens to be aware of the 'world affair' *par excellence*: peaceful coexistence. The ingredients of intercultural understanding have been nicely captured in the following statement by a former Director General of the IBO:

... we require all students to relate first to their own national identity—their own language, literature, history and cultural heritage, no matter where in the world this may be. Beyond that we ask that they identify with the corresponding traditions of others. It is not expected that they adopt alien points of view, merely that they are exposed to them and encouraged to respond intelligently. The end result, we hope, is a more compassionate population, a welcome manifestation of national diversity within an international framework of tolerant respect. Ideally, at the end of the IB experience, students should know themselves better than when they started while acknowledging that others can be right in being different.⁴

We are concerned then with forming attitudes and values. IB students give much time to world issues, to the environment, to poverty and other human problems. This is not only due to the general global approach of the curriculum, but above all to the requirement of ongoing social service among the community which is considered as important for the development of the students as academic studies. In short, it is an education for life, a responsible life, open to the problems of our world and encouraging students to give time and energy to bring about change.

Whose values?

Values are learnt, not inherited. Education therefore performs a fundamental role as one of the factors which shapes values. They do not exist in a vacuum and they are not immutable; circumstances can cause one's beliefs to change. Cultural relativists argue that values are very much tied to cultural contexts and may be influenced by the political, economic and social environment on an international, national, local and even family level. The current tension between national interests and a global market as espoused by the World Bank and the World Trade Organization is a case in point. A number of local producers feel that a supranational scheme may not address their concerns and may limit their chances in the international marketplace.

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A former African president found refuge in the cultural relativist's argument when he exhorted that his actions not be judged by Western standards: 'Mes pratiques peuvent paraître condamnables dans d'autres milieux, sous d'autres cieux, dans d'autres contextes; mais pas en Afrique' [My practices may be reprehensible in other places, beneath other skies, in other contexts; but not in Africa].⁵ This does not, however, excuse the many inhumane acts attributed to him. A set of universal values as in the Declaration of Human Rights transcends cultural boundaries.

The Constitution of UNESCO⁶ opens with the following words: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.' This is why it is possible and indeed essential to talk of the role of education and culture in building positive inter-community relationships. This is what international education is about.

But if values are dependent on cultural context, can we identify a set of culturally neutral universal values to which all people aspire? Core values are embedded in the age-old cultural

traditions of human civilization. For instance the following set of desirable universal values are to be found in the *Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* (known as the Delors Report):

- awareness of human rights combined with a sense of social responsibilities;
- value of social equity and democratic participation;
- understanding and tolerance of cultural differences and pluralism;
- a caring, co-operative and enterprising spirit;
- creativity;
- sensitivity to gender equality;
- open-mindedness to change; and
- obligation to environment protection and sustainable development.⁷

The essence of the *Delors Report* is the identification of four overarching pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. These are fundamental to any set of universal values. The most important of these for the establishment of a culture of peace is learning to live with each other; however, this is not easily achievable unless one is 'bien dans sa peau' ['at peace with oneself' is a close but inadequate rendering in English] as the French so aptly put it. And being 'bien dans sa peau' involves learning to know, learning to do and above all learning to be. This is the role of education in a global context. But an international perspective is not easily achievable without an understanding of one's own culture as a yardstick by which to understand others. The global outlook does not deny national or local imperatives; on the contrary, the supranational perspective is a construction of all nations which contribute to it. It is not surprising that employees of the UN and its agencies were the main actors in the establishment of the first international school in Geneva; these intergovernmental organizations represent national collaboration.

Article 26, paragraph 2 of the UN *Declaration of Human Rights* provides the philosophical planks of an international education:⁸

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality, and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

However, agreement on such universal values does not necessarily mean that different nations or ethnic groups will act in the same way. Walker has remarked that it is the interpretation of universal values which causes problems.⁹ He suggests that they will be given varying priorities by different people. Although universal values exist we are still trapped by their manifestation in hugely different circumstances. At a local level it is inconceivable that the members of a family who are bordering on death from starvation or those who have just seen their closest relatives murdered in cold blood before their eyes by an out-of-control army can have the *largesse d'esprit* to embrace lofty principles associated with international understanding in the same way as a comfortable middle-class family in a secure, first world country. Walker makes a helpful reference to Maslow's classic hierarchy of needs: from basic survival (food, water) through a sense of belonging, the acquisition of competencies and esteem to self-fulfilment, curiosity and the need to understand. Note that understanding occurs after all the other needs have been fulfilled. Is it any wonder that universal values are not interpreted in the same way? Add to this the Machiavellian manipulation of religious

or universal principles by unscrupulous political leaders or rebels to suit their own ends and we have whole populations who are disoriented by imposed values that are at odds with what they feel should be right. This is why the IBO mission statement is also concerned with compassion and understanding the human condition in all its variety.

Ethics and the IB diploma curricula

Students must study one subject from each of five major discipline groups—literature (in the student's best language), language (including modern and classical languages), individuals and societies, experimental sciences and mathematics. The sixth group, the arts, is optional and may be replaced by a second choice from one of the other five groups or a school may propose a syllabus for a subject which does not already exist, called a school-based syllabus. If this passes the rigorous screening process it will be accepted as a subject of the IB diploma. Three (and not more than four) subjects must be taken at Higher Level (HL) and three (and not less than two) at Standard Level (SL). The majority of students take three HL subjects and three SL subjects. HL involves more time, more content and more depth than SL. HL subjects are accepted as equivalent in academic rigour to traditional GCE 'A' levels (in the United Kingdom) and Advanced Placement subjects (in the United States). In addition, all students must study the theory of knowledge, the Extended Essay and Creativity, Action and Service (CAS). The remainder of this section provides some selective examples of IB curricula contributing to an education for ethics.

LETTERS AND HUMANITIES

The IBO offers literature courses in approximately fifty languages at native-speaker level. In addition to the literature pertaining to the language of the course, students must study three works of 'World Literature'. These must have been originally written in a language different from the student's language and they are normally read in translation. The purpose of world literature is to develop an appreciation of how different cultures influence and mould the experiences of life. Students will develop values, attitudes and respect for behaviour and points of view different from their own without necessarily being in agreement.¹⁰

The history course includes cultural interpretations of events and 'an appreciation of the historical dimension of the human condition'.¹¹ The geography programme seeks to promote 'a global perspective and international understanding through geographical education' and 'respect for different cultures through an understanding of their development and their interrelationships'.¹² The core content themes are: population dynamics, economic growth and development, human responses to natural hazards, agriculture and world food supply, and urban environments.

The IB diploma philosophy course promotes skills of conceptual analysis, rational argument and sensitivity to other points of view. It is rooted in an examination of the human condition which includes the concept of the other and the examination of ethical issues. One of the aims of the course is to enable students to 'examine critically their own experience and their ideological and cultural biases'.¹³

History of the Islamic world was created in part for students in non-Islamic countries to appreciate the origins of this religion. Unfortunately media reporting often shows Islam linked to international terrorism. Fanatical elements exist in many religions and religious devotees have been manipulated

for political motives for centuries—the ongoing unrest in Northern Ireland is evidence of this in the Christian world. This course aims to show that Islam is one of the great world religions, that it has fundamental values rooted in respect for others and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and that Islam has many followers in addition to the Arab world.

EXPERIMENTAL SCIENCES

A key aim of the experimental sciences is to ‘raise awareness of the moral/ethical, social, economic and environmental implications of using science and technology’.¹⁴ This addresses the human condition, the dignity of mankind, an integral part of international understanding. UNESCO has initiated agreements to control genetic research during the last part of the 1990s, and other agreements about nuclear weapons, chemical warfare, landmines, and protection of the natural environment have also been drawn up by the UN and its agencies. These are important contributions to values education that students should be aware of.

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Environmental systems clearly addresses a key global issue of international education. The IBO guide states: ‘... since the resolution of the major environmental issues rests so heavily upon international relationships and agreements, the programme naturally leads students to an appreciation of the nature and values of internationalism’.¹⁵ Most syllabus topics have international ramifications: for example global cycles and physical systems, the ecosystem, human population and carrying capacity, impacts of resource exploitation, conservation and biodiversity, pollution. As with the other subjects in this group, ethical and political responses to the material are required.

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

This compulsory course is fundamental to the educational philosophy of the IB Diploma Programme and has no exact equivalent in national education systems. It develops critical thinking skills. The curriculum is divided into three main parts: knowers and knowing, ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. One of the key aims of knowledge theory is to ‘identify values underlying judgements and knowledge claims pertinent to local and global issues’.¹⁶

The curriculum guide abounds with topic questions relating to intercultural understanding and values. Here are a number of examples:

- Students are asked to ponder the meaning of the Ghanaian proverb: ‘If the frog tells you that the crocodile is dead, do not doubt it.’
- What is the role of language in creating and reinforcing social distinctions such as class, ethnicity and gender?
- Should scientists be held morally responsible for the applications of their discoveries?
- Are there ethical obligations for humanity to treat the natural environment in a certain way?
- What are human rights and on what basis do they rest?
- When the moral codes of individual nations conflict, can criteria be developed for an international morality which transcends them?
- What beliefs or knowledge, if any, are independent of culture?

These are, of course, difficult questions with no right or wrong answers. The learning is in the process, in the class discussion which needs to be skilfully prepared and facilitated by the teacher.

CREATIVITY ACTION SERVICE

This compulsory component of the diploma programme encourages students to participate in sports, artistic pursuits and community service on a weekly basis. In this way young people share their energies and talents while developing awareness, concern and the capacity to work co-operatively with others. 'The IB goal of educating the whole person and fostering a more compassionate citizenry comes alive in an immediate way when students reach beyond themselves and their books'.¹⁷ CAS addresses consideration of the human condition and the honing of values. Many projects in schools around the world also promote intercultural understanding and attention to global issues.

An IB school in Atlanta, Georgia (USA) started a project with other schools throughout North America to campaign against landmines by increasing public awareness of the number of innocent people treading on them each day and the cost and danger in clearing minefields. Students work with refugee families to reinforce the language of the host country and to provide moral support; IBO schools in the developing world (or visiting from abroad) assist local schools and villages with books, materials, taking lessons, and inviting local students and teachers into the IBO school to integrate with the students who may be expatriates. In a number of schools IB students provide weekly survival (literacy and numeracy) and recreational programmes for street children in both developed and developing countries. Students in an IBO school in Uganda, in collaboration with UNICEF, address the global issue of AIDS through local action. They give weekly moral support to families with HIV positive parents, building up memory banks of the family history and values told by the parents and recorded on tape by the students; this will then be available to the children after the parents have died.

'An international education must go well beyond the provision of information and is involved in the development of attitudes and values which transcend barriers of race, class, religion, gender or politics'.¹⁸ In this way many CAS activities contribute very personally to international understanding, the mark of world citizenship.

SCHOOL-BASED SYLLABI

'Peace and conflict studies' treats concepts of peace and violence, the phenomenon of human aggression, arms and disarmament, regions in conflict, and international organizations. The arms and disarmament section includes a discussion of the effects of nuclear weapons and warfare, the technological development of the arms arsenals and their effect on relationships between political blocs, the dynamics of the arms race, and initiatives for the control, limitation and reduction of armaments since 1945. Student assessment comprises a final written examination of three hours, two course work essays and oral presentations of course work.

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'We are living in the midst of a permanent wartime economy. The most important capital good produced in the West today is weaponry. The most important sector in international trade is not oil or automobiles or aeroplanes. It is armaments'.¹⁹ This statement, almost a decade old, is no less true today and some developing

countries are also producing arms to boost their economy—beating the West at its own game. To justify the huge sums spent on the manufacture of arms, politicians produce arguments about providing employment, developing technology, protecting their own country and boosting the national economy (in spite of the fact that very long-term loans at extremely low interest rates are usually negotiated with the consumer government and not reimbursed in full, if at all). Governments create loopholes to sell arms to the very countries they themselves have officially blacklisted. Few countries in the world can sleep at night with a clear conscience. It is important that students see this reality and reflect on it.

In 'World politics and international relations' role play is used extensively to simulate conflicts in international relations and other situations involving negotiations. One of its principal aims is to 'remove personal bias enough for [the students] to comprehend the perspective of any other nation and thus to promote international understanding'.²⁰ A recent examination question asked students to discuss the need for collective and individual rights in relation to the statement that Pan-Africanism reflects the African view of human rights as based on collective, community relationships, and not on the Western concept of individual rights.

'World religions' undertakes a critical yet sympathetic study of the beliefs and practices across the world in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Its aim is to enhance intercultural and inter-religious understanding and an appreciation of the very similar values which underpin these religions.

Conclusion

The world's moral order is in some disarray. There are still far too many examples of man's inhumanity to man. There are inequitably distributed resources and a lack of any basic education for many millions of children in the developing world. Values education is lacking, inefficient or unsustainable when people are confronted with hard choices under pressure. The IBO, alongside many other NGOs and organized bodies, is promulgating humanitarian and ecological values through education. The private sector has also adopted the challenge. For example, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, founded in 1991, is a coalition of some 150 international companies united by a shared commitment to three values: economic growth (important for social improvement), environmental protection and social equity. The number of success stories of good financial profits being made by upholding these values is growing as companies network to find creative solutions.²¹ There are alternatives to the sale of arms for economic stability and expansion.

The French scientific philosopher Michel Serres laments international relations which are based on dominance, power and competition. He remarks wisely that the winners will change over time as they always have throughout history. The irony is that dominance is the most shared thing in the world (over time). The tragedy is that the struggle for dominance multiplies human misery. The frustration is that no one really wins in the longer term and those in charge do not realize it or prefer to ignore it.²² Nelson Mandela articulated this same thought when he said: 'I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.'²³ It appears that Costa Rica alone—the only country without an army—has understood.

Political leaders, preoccupied with national security, seem oblivious to the much larger threat to global security which will require a collaborative effort by all nations to harness and respect the world's natural resources for the preservation of the human race. Jeremy Rifkin, president and founder of the Foundation on Economic Trends, is one of a number who see the magnitude of

environmental changes altering the biochemistry of our planet and that this requires the undivided and united attention of the nations.²⁴

International education has a role to impart an ethic for the future of humanity. Not to impose but to allow students to discover and reflect for themselves. It should provide students with material on global issues, responses from some of the world's most creative thinkers and the opportunity to discuss. Without values students may be 'clever, knowledgeable, even wondrously creative, but they will never become citizens of the world nor give it their gifts as should those who have known a true international education'.²⁵

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When Stalin died there was a tape recording of Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor, which he listened to frequently, next to his bed. He had specially requested it some years before when he had heard it broadcast on the radio. Like many despotic leaders before and since, Stalin was not lacking in culture but lacking in education for humanity.

Notes

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