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Internationalism in Education: Making it a Reality in International Schools through Standards

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Abstract

In the current international climate schools across the world are concerned to create a more international focus in their programs. Defining this has not been as easy, and the variety of terms used reflects different perspectives. Two major international school organisations, the International Baccalaureate Organization and Council for International Schools, monitoring programs and school accreditation. Both increasingly focus on this and have created standards and criteria reflecting habits and behaviour, which will be part of the accreditation process. This paper looks at the assumptions and programs of the CIS and IBO in light of current literature. The answers from CIS and the IBO are of defining importance, given their links to member schools and the rapid growth in international schools.

Introduction

What it means to provide a global or international dimension to education has been a discussion stretching back many years but it could be argued that the debate has at no time more intense than it is at present. This has been especially true for those involved with international school education. Their unique position, combined with their own growing pains individually and as a body of schools, has made them aware not only of the limitations of older definitions but has pushed them to explore on a pragmatic level how best to make international ideals and values a reality in the daily life of their school communities. In light of these changes, there has been a general recognition in the literature that international schools are in a second phase of development (Bunnell 2007b, Hayden-Thompson 1998) which requires or perhaps demands some common affirmation of values, purpose and standards. While some have seen fit to concentrate on issues of input such as refining definitions of an international education or developing international curriculum others have focused on outcomes expressed through standards. This paper will look at new initiatives for applying standards for international mindedness to schools as well as some of the preoccupations this approach has raised.

International Schools: Diversity and Growth

Before continuing, it is necessary to deal with what we mean by an international school. This subject has received a great deal of treatment (Heywood 2002, Bunnell 2007a) which can only be briefly summarized here. While some schools are seen to have an 'exclusive' mission, that is they were founded to serve the needs of a particular national system or were created on an ideological or 'visionary' basis such as United World Colleges, the vast majority fall into the 'inclusive' or 'pragmatic' category which means

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that they exist to serve the needs of the international school population in their particular location (Sylvester 2005, Bunnell 2007b).

The profile of 'inclusive' schools, moreover, has not remained static but become increasingly diverse. In looking at the profile inclusive international schools in 2000 in comparison with 1980 we can see many changes. One of the first is that the majority of these schools are no longer in Europe but in developing countries. Their student/parent body which included high percentages from the US or UK is now dominated by home country and other third country nationals (MacDonald 2006). In addition, while most of these schools continue to be English language medium schools, most students are now non-native English speakers. Since these 'new' students often have university preferences which do not include the US or the UK, schools have had to rethink their curricular offerings. For many schools these collective changes have created a real identity crisis. Squarely at the core of this identity crisis is the need to find a new understanding of what it means to truly offer international education programme.

Hand-in-hand with these changes has come the rapid increase in the number of international schools. The total which stood at 1000 in 1995, by January, 2007 had increased to 4,580 (Brummitt 2007). Estimates are that this number should rise to around 9000 by 2020 with China alone having, perhaps, 3000 international schools (Brummitt 2007). Just as the changing diversity in individual schools created an identity crisis so the rapid growth of the international schools 'industry' as a whole raised the spectre that the values either implicit or explicit to which established international schools adhered would be swamped by a host of new schools created from a wide variety of motives.

Rethinking internationalism in education in terms of inputs

The prevalent approach to making schools more international in their focus has been to concentrate more on inputs. In the first instance this has meant a focus on defining terminology and secondly on curriculum writing. With regard to definitions, earlier models were concerned with global issues centring on themes like peace education, cultural diversity, and environmental concerns. More recent discussions have tended to shift the focus more to the attitudes, value systems, habits of mind, and 'emotional intelligence', necessary for successful living and working in a cross-cultural or pluralistic setting (Heywood 2002). As a result terms like 'international' or 'global' education have fallen somewhat out of favour to be replaced by others stressing 'international mindedness' or 'world mindedness' (James 2005). Others attempting to distance themselves from a 'national' focus altogether have suggested terms like 'inter-cultural', 'pan-cultural understanding', 'inter-cultural literacy' or 'cosmopolitanism' (Heywood 2004).

A second approach has been to define internationalism in education in terms of a course of study or curriculum. While there have been a variety of such attempts clearly the most important and most successful has been the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) founded in the 1960s. The original programme, the IB Diploma Programme designed for the last two years of secondary education, addressed the issue primarily by providing an international curriculum structure buttressed by additions like Theory of Knowledge and Community Action Service. The later programmes, Middle Years

Programme (MYP), 1994, and Primary Years Programme (PYP), 1997, included more of a focus on affective concerns which led to the creation of a student profile which stressed attitudes, values and habits of mind which reflect a broad international awareness and sensitivity. In 2006, the IBO published a 10-point Learner Profile which replaced the earlier versions which now applies to all programs (Bunnell 2007b).

While the IB has created a comprehensive set of programmes with a curricular structure thoroughly imbued with an international perspective, it has been less effective in monitoring to what extent the goals of the programme or outcomes (especially the more subjective habits of mind) are actually realized within any given school context (McKenzie 1998). While the PYP and MYP have set up routine programme review structures including an external appraisal by and IB team the Diploma Programme has not.

Defining International Education through Standards

An alternative or complementary approach is to consider the issue of internationalism in education in a more pragmatic way, namely in terms of outcomes or standards. This has shifted the discussion from what is taught to what is learned, to a consideration of what competencies in international mindedness look like in practice and to issues of school improvement and accountability. One model, in this regard, has been developed by International School Association (ISA). The recently published *Internationalism in Schools: A Self-Study Guide* was issued in 2006 and represents thinking that goes back almost a decade and involving the IB research unit in Bath. The ISA guide avoids set definitions of any kind asserting that a school must define for itself what it means by internationalism in education. It notes that given the diversity of international schools there will be 'many and varied understandings of internationalism and international mindedness' (ISA 2006:4). The guide, organized in a questionnaire format, recommends that a school complete a self-analysis and collect evidence of how well it meets the identified standards by looking at the various aspects of school operations. Based on these reflections action plans are developed.

ISA makes it clear that 'no external criteria nor any measurement or assessments either of the process or the outcomes' are provided (ISA 2006:6). Furthermore, a school is free to use part or the entire self-study guide as it sees fit applying it to part of all of a school's operation. How a school uses the information from the report and in what time frame is left for the school to decide.

Another approach, similar in some respects but quite different in others is offered by the Council of International Schools (CIS), the largest international school accreditation body. A non-profit organization, CIS is made up of member international schools. Founded in 1970 ECIS divided its operations in 1997 creating CIS, which took over accreditation services. Currently, there are 190 accredited schools and 450 member schools. Since 1990 accredited schools have increased by 8% a year with almost as many schools accredited in the period 2000-2006 as in the entire period 1972-2000 (Fertig 2007).

It should be noted that for CIS the issue of internationalism in education or international mindedness, has moved from the periphery of the accreditation process to a central position. If, in the 6th edition (1997) of the accreditation handbook there are sporadic references to internationalism, the topic is more squarely faced in the seventh edition (2003). In the all-important Philosophy and Objectives section a new standard has been added stating that school goals should be in line with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Standards in both this section, the curriculum section and in the Student Life section ask that the school 'promote intercultural and international awareness' among members of its school community who have different cultural, linguistic and national backgrounds' (CIS 2003:86).

Even with these additions to the standards and indicators it was felt by CIS that the issue needed to be given a more prominent focus by establishing international mindedness as a basic membership category. To this end, the CIS leadership drew up a draft proposal in March, 2007, entitled 'Defining Internationalism in Education through Standards' which was submitted to the membership for debate. The stated plan received strong support from the membership and will become part of the CIS accreditation framework in the forthcoming eighth edition to be published in 2009.

In the introduction, the CIS leadership concedes that regarding the issue of international mindedness 'there have been years of philosophical debate on this topic. We believe that it is time to agree on a working definition and get on with trying to make it a reality' (Bartlett-Tangye: 2). This working definition, it is stated, will be defined through core standards which centre on the broad themes of Ethical behaviour, Diversity, Global Issues, Communication, Service and Leadership. In effect, the CIS document comments,

One could say we are proposing 'facets of internationalism'...Put another way, if a student has a personal ethical code, appreciates diversity, understands and acts upon global issues, communicates well in several languages, has a sense of personal responsibility to a wider community and has the capacity to lead, then we have developed and 'internationally-minded' individual, equipped and disposed to make a constructive contribution to society. (Bartlett-Tangye: 5).

The idea is that schools would be provided with rubrics which spell out typical attributes defining different levels of school achievement in any of the theme areas (for instance leadership or ethical practice). The schools would be free to suggest attributes of their own which would better define the issue within their own cultural setting. Schools would then need to collect data based on their own practice, reflect on how well they meet the standard and create plans for improvement.

The use of standards is seen as ideal since they 'express powerful ideas in a simple format' and does not simply define but establishes high expectations which are seen as essential in 'driving forward our field of professional development' (Bartlett-Tangye:2).

With these points in mind, the similarities and differences between the ISA and CIS processes emerge clearly. Both programmes stress the centrality of the school's self-study, that all aspects of school life should be considered and that a school's practice be evaluated against their own philosophy. Community involvement is stressed as is

thoughtful data collection, and the creation of action plans for improvement. There are, however, a number of important differences. While ISA asks the school to define internationalism for itself, CIS relies on standards developed externally drawing on a professional review of best practices. If ISA says that the school alone should evaluate how well practice is aligned with philosophy CIS adds a team visit which is designed to give an external perspective as well. The ISA process has great flexibility allowing the school to use in whole or part the results of the self-study in whatever way or time frame they feel appropriate. CIS has built in a much higher degree of accountability by linking standards clearly to the accreditation process in general and to a monitoring framework. (CIS 2003:6)

Preoccupations Regarding a Standards Approach

CIS's blended internal-external evaluation process guided by standards and involving a school self-study and an external visitation is in line with much of the research on school improvement (Nevo 2001, Scheerens 1999). Some critics, however, have raised concerns both about the use of external standards and the role or necessity of an external partner (Fertig 2007, Cambridge-Thompson 2004). The problem with generic standards applying to international understanding or any other school issue, it is claimed, is that they will have a homogenizing effect, ignoring local realities. There is the sense that a one-size-fits-all model could be even more of an issue when applied to the diverse world of international schools and issues of international education (Hayden-Thompson 1998). Externally derived standards, it is felt, do not empower teachers and will either be resisted or submitted to grudgingly. There is a similar negative evaluation of external evaluation which is seen, again, as out of touch with local realities and focused on accountability issues rather than school improvement (Fertig 2007).

Those concerned with globalization and its impact on international schools have another worry. Here the issue is not just that generic models will be created but that these Western global 'brands' (and this is especially critical with an issue like international mindedness) will tend to replace alternative formulations in Starbucks fashion (Cambridge 2004). This whole process, it is claimed, is driven not by the more idealistic values of internationalism but rather by the need of international corporations for schools of a common type for their global elite employees (Cambridge-Thompson 2004, MacDonald 2006). IB curricular packages and / or the CIS accreditation process are viewed from this perspective simply as quality control mechanisms.

Criticisms Regarding A Standards Approach and Role of External Partner: An Evaluation

One of the central problems in discussing the whole issue of standards is to define the term. In national systems the term 'standards' most often applies to curriculum, to student achievement or to teacher performance and are usually expressed in terms of set of rather narrow performance criteria to which a school is asked to comply.

In an international context lacking a fixed curriculum, and no common framework for student testing or teacher evaluation it is not feasible or even possible to develop such narrow criteria similar to those in many national systems. An examination of CIS

standards for instance shows that they are, on the whole, very broad and holistic in nature. They are also framed in terms of 'best practices' rather than as performance criteria. Many CIS standards focus on an issue which not arise in national public, namely how the practice of the school aligns with its own distinct philosophy and objectives. The promotion of student learning is another major theme around with many CIS standard are focused as well as has already noted, on international mindedness (CIS: 2003). In comparison with standards as applied in national systems, international school standards are significantly different in both form and function.

Another critical issue in understanding the role of standards regards both the audience to which they are addressed and the use to which they will be put. Often in national systems standards function, as has been noted above, strictly as an accountability measure. The link with school improvement is, in most cases, a secondary concern. For CIS the process is just the reverse. While CIS standards do set a level of accountability, one of their primary functions, if not the primary function, is to act as a focal point and a stimulus for a school's self-reflection and plans for improvement. (CIS 2003:6)

The new standards on international mindedness framed as expectations seem especially immune to the charge of 'standardization'. The aim of the CIS standards is clearly reflected by Haywood when he comments that 'international mindedness is actually a multifaceted entity that can be represented in a wide variety of practical forms. The educators role is not to direct students towards a particular style of international mindedness but instead to encourage a predisposition towards international mindedness in general that will allow students to develop their own responses and channels of expression' (p85 Sage Handbook). While providing a structured process, the standards themselves create an open framework for the school to reflect on its practice. The constant solicitation of feedback from CIS member schools should make these standards in particular a 'work in progress'. Schools are free, it should be noted, to suggest their own indicators as sub-sets of the broader standards to be used in the self-study.

Having said this, standards in an area like international mindedness recognize that while the interpretation of these standards 'may take multiple forms in different countries or regions certain common, essential elements and supporting attributes' can be defined. Haywood. Again as Heywood comments 'Although the approaches in dealing with issues such as leadership and diversity for instance can be 'culturally determined, there is no need for the outcomes to be locally distinct...there is no reason why the objective of such a common benchmark should not be a unifying feature to which all internationally minded schools can adhere' (p87 Sage Handbook). Standards can provide a common language and terminology. Also the accountability aspect of these standards is critical since it raises the concept of international mindedness from a generic concern to a legitimate and necessary part of any member school's educational program. As Bartlett and Tangye state, the commitment to develop and promote these concepts is now 'simply a condition of membership (Bartlett-Tangye: 2).

Closely linked with the issues of standards is the role of an external partner in the process of school evaluation. If the role of the partner is collaborative and focused on issues such as the general alignment of a school's practice with standards of good practice; if the school visit is carefully conceived as a process of dialogue and

partnership then the external partner can make a valuable contribution. CIS makes it clear that the standards are not designed to judge teachers, to compare schools to each other not to provide overly proscriptive recommendations. The external monitoring of the school is framed as a 'team visit' of professional colleagues and not as an 'inspection'. The team visit comes after the school's own self-study which also contains their recommendations for improvement. The visit in the vast majority of cases serves as a validation of the efforts of the school.

Research has also shown that school evaluation models which are strictly internal routinely suffer from certain weaknesses concerning the organization of the self-study, issues of data gathering and interpretation, and the ability to follow through on addressing identified problems. A supportive relationship with an external partner can effectively and efficiently help a school better deal with these critical issues. (Ryan 2007, McNamara 2005).

Ironically, a relationship with an external partner, despite what critics contend, may actually be more essential for international schools than it is for national schools. One of the features of international schools not shared by national schools is the generally high turn over in their school communities. Voluntary initiatives taken on by one group of administrators or teachers can fade as those people leave and others take their place. One real strength of the IB as well as the CIS accreditation model in international school education, for instance, is that they create a backbone and a set of expectations, and standards of accountability which survive personnel changes. This is critical when working with the issue of international mindedness.

In addition, given the general isolation of international schools a dialogue with an external partner is often seen as positive since it provides models of good practice against which to compare themselves. Also in many cases schools in developing countries with a heavy concentration of local students, teachers and parents find the perspective and support of an external partner like CIS an invaluable ally in their efforts to improve more traditional educational practices.

Finally, there is the contention that accreditation systems like CIS's may be unwittingly promoting a globalist agenda. It is safe to say without going into the merits of rival globalist theories that the rapid growth of international schools is fuelled to a large degree by international business expansion and that there are pressures coming from a variety of sources for new schools to adopt recognized, 'brand name' curriculum's or services.

That being said the analogy of accreditation programmes like CIS driving out competition Starbuck's style seems wide of the mark. As a member operated, non-profit organization there is no inherent need or desire for CIS to expand its operations. Rather than the CIS or IB 'brand' driving out competition, there seems to evidence to the contrary of a great deal of hybridising of programmes to meet local needs and those of various national systems of education using the programmes and services. The IB, for instance, has been working for some time with developing countries to adapt their curriculum to meet local needs but this is also true of CIS. Australia was the first to develop a partnership to adapt the CIS model to national requirements. Similar

modifications or adaptations have also taken place in three countries with the highest growth in new international schools, China, Thailand and the UAE. In the UAE, the government has decreed that all independent schools will have international accreditation but at the same time the government has set up a state regulatory board to monitor the services provided by international agencies (*Khaleej Times Online* 2008).

Certainly such developments are conducive to a certain degree of optimism, and suggest that important concepts like international mindedness will not simply be imposed from the outside but will be part of an evolving dialogue. It also raises the question of how standards like those proposed by CIS are seen to function by schools in developing countries. To what extent are they an unwanted source of homogenisation and to what extent a stimulus to the professionalization of educational practice?

From an organizational perspective, CIS as of 2007, has clearly reacted to the globalist challenge. They now required that all member schools must seek accreditation in two years guaranteeing that an affiliation with the organization could not be used for promotional purposes without a full commitment to the accreditation process. Most importantly, however, the new standards on international mindedness have served as a clear ideological statement about CIS's identity and purpose. These standards, it is stated, will 'define 'where we stand' as a group of schools to the world within and outside of international education' and affirm the necessity of going beyond the pragmatic goal of just preparing students for university study by 'addressing what it means to be truly internationally minded.' (Bartlett-Tangye: 2)

Another positive development in this so called second phase of international school development is a growing cooperation between international school providers. This was symbolized by the foundation of the Alliance of International Education (AIE) formed in 2005. The organization which includes the IB, CIS, ISA, UWC and others is dedicated to creating a higher level of partnership, teamwork and the promotion of collaborative ventures. Underpinning AIE is the idea that the creation of a quality international educational programme will come not from any one source acting on its own but from a synergy of different approaches and ideas.

It should be noted that the synergy inherent in the approach of AIE is already happening to a certain degree on a pragmatic level within schools. International schools routinely go through not only an evaluation by CIS but also by the IB programmes. Added to this often are evaluations coming from other curriculum programmes the schools may be teaching such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) or the Advance Placement (AP) Certification program. Each of these requires a slightly different perspective that widens the vision of what it means to offer a quality international program. Moreover, collectively they are an antidote to the homogenizing impact of a single system of school or programme evaluation (Van Damme 2000).

Conclusion

International schools responding to a variety of pressures have focused their attention increasingly on the issue of what a truly international education should look and feel

like. While some effort has gone into defining what an 'international education' means and the appropriate terms to be used others have focused on producing international curriculum. Still others have seen the need not just to focus on inputs but on outcomes as well; in other words to assess to what degree actual practice reflects a concepts such as international mindedness. CIS, the biggest player in the area of international school evaluation, has increasingly focused on the issue of international mindedness as defined through standards. The evolution of the organization is very much a product of changing member schools needs and concerns. The unique definition of standards, seen as expectations has created a broad framework which attempts to steer away from one fixed definition of the phenomena but at the same time affirms that there are certain common themes which link school practice in an international context. This approach has come under some criticism the most insistent being that standards result in standardization and a one-size-fits-all approach. A careful review of the CIS process shows that on every level there has been a realization of this problem and strategies developed to allow schools to express their individual identities. The process is structures to create a possibility for dialogue while at the same time requiring level of accountability both of which are essential for effective school improvement. Certainly in this climate of rapid growth CIS must concern itself with maintaining the integrity of the process and the atmosphere of collegiality and partnership between the organization and the schools which have characterized the relationship up to now. Another critical issue which will strongly influence the success of standards in creating a rich climate of international mindedness will the ongoing training and continued support given teachers in their efforts to implement and assess these ideas.

Again it should be stressed that the standards approach advocated by CIS as only one tool to improve the quality of international school education. The growth of the AIE initiative creates the prospective that a working alliance for international education can be formed which will draw on the strengths of different programs and approaches. The increasing degree of hybridisation and adaptation of programmes also gives hope that the shape of international education and issues such as international mindedness will be a collaborative effort involving local and national communities.

These initiatives in international schools focused on making international mindedness a reality in schools provide some interesting topics for future research. Given the growing links between international and national education practice these developments in international schools form part of a much wider discussion about what it means to be an educated individual in the 21st century.

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