

## INTERPRETING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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### **International Education – Formalising 40 Years of Dialogue**

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It is with feelings of pride, optimism and thanks that I begin my remarks today.

**Pride** in the achievements of the ‘international education’ movement, particularly in the period since the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s. These achievements are considerable but have not been without their tears and struggles of one form or another, but, I have observed never without a deeply held belief in the values that are apparent in this movement. These values have sustained it in good and tough times. If we were not optimists we would have all faded away many years ago. We must continue to strive to create greater opportunities for the next generation who we can only hope improve on our generation’s attempt to build a better world.

This is an opportunity for me, on behalf of the governing body of the IBO, the Council of Foundation, to say thanks to those of our staff who took the initiative to convene this gathering and to those people who have been involved in planning the conference and the various members of the planning committees. I also wish to thank each of you for your attendance and the professionalism and commitment that you bring to the conference table.

In my remarks this morning I shall seek to explore whether there are sound reasons for moving along the ad hoc and mostly informal dialogue that we have engaged in over the last 40 years to a more structured and formalised network or even dare I say it another organisation. From the outset may I add that this is a session that requires debate and a broad consensus before embarking on action which involves committing time and expenditure.

I attended my first IBO Council of Foundation meeting in 1992 and became the Chair of the then Executive Committee in 1996. In 1998 I joined the United World College International Board. My ‘hands-on’ experience is therefore limited. Sadly not a great deal has been written that pieces together the work that has been done within and across international education provider organisations. Perhaps that is a task that alone has the potential to bind each of us and our respective organisations.

Firstly allow me to ask this question. What is it about international education that fascinates us? Many people ask me how I became involved with the IBO and I recall my interest in establishing an international school among the 650 state schools which came under my responsibility as Minister for Education in South Australia. The first state school I approved to introduce the IB Diploma also established a fee paying overseas students program (also a

first) and intensive English language workshops. Within a decade this became one of our states most successful schools. Today Adelaide, a city of one million people, has some 26 schools that take one or all of the IB's three programs. This number will reach 50 within the next twelve months. Each of those schools has committed to a change of a whole of school ethos – measured steps were taken before reaching the decision point to 'go international' – to provide their students and teachers indeed the whole school community with the opportunity to grow in a way that is simply not available within the National System. These schools took risks, they broke the mould, they took a step into the unknown, they placed their trust in many of us present at this conference and our organisations.

By contrast, not many people ask me why I am involved in international education. I am a lawyer by training not an educator. I have spent some 25 years of my working life in and around the corridors of our State Parliament – 10 as a Ministerial adviser and almost fifteen as an MP – eleven of those as a Minister. It was during my term as Minister of Education that I came to appreciate the power for good and the power for change for the better vested in the education process. For eleven years I sat around a cabinet table with 12 colleagues each with a portfolio of responsibilities be it in health, transport, police, treasury and so on. I soon found that I was the only person around the table who had a distinctly positive, formative, non regulatory duty. The provision of a vibrant, relevant well resourced education system is vital in the building of strong communities and a confident and contributing state and nation. Every time I got a little depressed in the education portfolio I would slip out of my office and visit a school. The remedy never failed me. I always saw hope in the faces of the children and the skill of the professional teacher. It renewed my enthusiasm to do that bit more, to speak up for schools and for teachers – to give our students the opportunities they deserve, and to look beyond the present. This is a perilous approach for a politician – and has taken me along many steep paths without really knowing where I was going. It is often by the strangest of events that one joins an organisation and then within its framework together with similarly motivated colleagues discover what once seemed impossible now becomes possible.

Alec Peterson in his book 'Schools across Frontiers' wrote this of Kurt Hahn whose vision inspired the builders of international education in the post World War II years.

'If you believe in something, you must not just think or talk or write, but must act. All education that Hahn cared for was aimed at changing young people's attitudes in such a way as to lead them to change their actions. The attitudes he wanted to change were: national and racial prejudices and the causes of war; something which he used to call 'spectatoritis', the preference for watching other people do things rather than doing them oneself; and what he often described as the 'declines' which were affecting youth as a result of the exhausted, disenchanting, and increasingly cynical culture of post-war Europe and America: the decline in physical fitness, in enterprise, in memory and imagination, in skill and care, in self-discipline, and in compassion. Long before most educators, Hahn was shocked by the catchwords '*Ohne mich*' and 'I couldn't care less'. He would, I believe, be shocked today to find 'caring' transformed into a politician's catchword and 'compassion' into a cliché. As educational remedies for those attitudes, he saw the common involvement of young people of different nations and cultures in active, skilful, challenging (even physically dangerous) service to others, particularly the saving of life: in academic studies that taxed the memory and imagination; in teamwork which involved both exercising and accepting leadership; and in the pursuit by each individual of his 'grand passion' – whether that was playing the cello, building boats, entomology, or Renaissance architecture. It was the vision of an idealist and of a teacher, but Hahn was both a Platonist and a realist, a

teacher who had a genius for translating his visions, and inspiring others to translate his visions, into action.'

I have talked today about our impact within the context of schools that are touched by our organisation – a very small number of schools throughout the world and in the main schools belonging to the first world.

If our idealism is to be transformed into change for the better, an education movement, 'a new world system of education' as Peterson envisioned, then let us spend a moment considering the reality of our world.

The Earth Summit which concluded last week - the biggest gathering of heads of government since the Rio Conference a decade ago - concluded with many participants disheartened. The optimism of Rio had been dashed by the cold hard facts we live in a world where:

- more than 1.1 billion people are undernourished
- more than 1 billion people do not have clean water, which directly causes the deaths of 2.2 million people per year
- in Southern Africa, where the summit was held, some 14 million people are facing famine.

Little progress in improving this situation has occurred in the last decade.

Similar summits of the world's Education Ministers have revealed totally unacceptable circumstances:

- some 240 million children do not attend school, 2/3 of whom are girls
- 1/5 of the world lives in South Asia yet it has less than 1% of the world's Internet users
- 10% of the world's people understand English yet 80% of the web sites are in English
- the typical Internet user is male, under 35 years of age, with a university qualification and high income, lives in a city and speaks English.

I recently attended a school speech day and I relate to you some words from the Headmaster's report. He said in the last 50 years there had been 3 and possibly 4 defining moments for not only western civilisation but for humanity:

- dropping the Atom bomb on Hiroshima
- the first person to walk on the surface of the moon
- the fall of the Berlin Wall
- the events of September 11 2001 in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

These are the decades in which we have been forming an international education movement.

Then he said:

'It seems that the more we observe these complex issues of the power of technology to destroy as well as create, and as a fearful impression grows that humanity actually seems to prefer to hate rather than to love itself, the more we are driven back to the question of what

is it to be a human being, what is it to have a mind, a heart, a soul? Have we of the West gone down the path of functionalism at the expense of our humanity'.

He went on to quote from a an article in *The Spectator*, 'the strange death of literate England':

The author noted that the study of literature in schools and universities now focuses on ideological content rather than the artistic experience. Questions are asked whether the literary work is tainted with colonialist attitudes, is it anti-feminine, what does it tell us about the social struggles of the time, and so on. It is a far cry from the perspective on literature given by C S Lewis - 'Literature enlarges our being by admitting us to experiences not our own. They may be beautiful, terrible, awe-inspiring, exhilarating, pathetic, comic, or merely piquant. Literature gives the entrée to them all. True readers seldom fully realise the enormous extension of their being which they owe to authors. In reading good literature, I become a thousand men, and yet remain myself, I transcend myself: and am never more myself than when I do'.

It is getting back to the adage, that the heart of education is the education of the heart. How else deal with the problems of humanity except by ensuring that oneself is truly human.

The Headmaster then said to the graduands:

'So to prepare you for a world marked by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> we work with your parents to help you form a mind and heart and soul that can help prevent you from losing your sense of dignity and self-possession when forces of evil seem to take control of the day; that can help you reflect on the present and transcend it in order to gain perspective. The Harvard writer, Professor Heifetz wrote in his book on leadership about the balcony and the dance. In order to gain a perspective on the events that happen around us, the dance of daily events, we need to be able to get to the balcony to see the patterns of movements on the dance floor. If we do not see the pattern then we can easily be swamped by the events. Heifetz gave the example of the Vietnam War when President Lyndon Johnson became caught up in the unfamiliar dance of foreign policy and was swamped by the expectations of others, so that he engaged in America's conflict with Vietnam without ever leading it. We have to have an inner sense of identity and judgement in order to be able to go to the high ground, or to the balcony, to see the directions in which things are happening. Why and whither.'

Thus far I have been searching some might say groping for the golden thread that draws our organisations and each of us characterised by the five separate strands of this conference into the rich tapestry of international education. What image might we possibly weave?

Is it now possible to form amongst us and others of like mind an alliance for international education? A structure or an agreement that will see our dialogue continue, now with a common vision, focus and purpose.

May I suggest an agenda of topics that can only be effectively advanced by concerted and broad based action.

1. A rekindling of the vision for international education espoused by such persons as Hahn and Peterson some 40 years ago embodied in a contemporary statement.

2. A better understanding by governments, universities, governmental and non-governmental organisations of the meaning of international education.
3. An articulation between schools that embrace an international ethos and the tertiary education sector – both universities and technical education institutions who share a similar ethos.
4. Is it possible for these tertiary institutions to move outside of their state and national boundaries and become truly international in their outlook and in substance in the same way that so many schools have done over these last 40 years? Who else will challenge in this way if we don't these vital institutions in the world community?
5. Does this lead to a discussion about not only the training of teachers about which you all have so much to contribute but does it not concern also the training of doctors, of nurses, of engineers, of scientists, of teachers of literature? Is it sufficient to believe that the responsibility for the formation of the international citizen concludes at the end of secondary schooling? Can we encourage the creation of international universities or clusters of universities that take on the values that are so much part of our understanding of international education? Can then the schools with which we are associated develop relationships with these lighthouse tertiary education providers that satisfy a multitude of currently unmet needs eg:
  - a formal accreditation of teacher workshops and professional development programs
  - collaboration on research projects
  - curriculum development and evaluation
  - objective review of examination and assessment philosophy, processes and outcomes
  - the development of an international curriculum within the undergraduate training of teachers and other education professionals and the recasting of inservice training
  - the development of the tertiary sector as an additional tier of influence and advocacy for the advancement of international education particularly with respect to government policy within nations and states and also in international forums
  - the placement of academics for periods of time in international schools of a high standard to enable much of the above to be achieved in a school setting.
6. The creation of a body of knowledge which helps to explain the concept of lifelong learning in an international context.
7. An organisation that is respected and whose opinion is sought by policy makers and decision takers on the subject of international education curriculum, its teaching and assessment.
8. An organisation that is capable of influencing decision makers at the highest level on education policy.
9. An organisation that is capable of effectively advocating on behalf of those who are powerless and whose voice is not heard in forums and within governments where if it was heard there is the capacity for a major change for the better for those most dispossessed of educational opportunity.
10. Is the application of new technologies that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning in educational institutions actually helping to reduce the tragic and hitherto

unstoppable divide between that minority of the world's population who can access what is every person's right to educational opportunity and the majority who cannot?

11. Can the world's leaders be influenced to gain a better understanding of the fundamental role that education provision must play in world development policy? There is no more effective instrument to sever the cycle of poverty that entraps the majority of the world's population than access to education. Yet in almost all regions of the world government expenditure on education is static or declining.

These are just a few agenda items that I thought I should share with you. No doubt each of you has a longer list of your own arising not only from these days that we are spending together but from the experience of what may seem like a lifetime in the field of international education.

Is this agenda the stuff that would bring us together on a more regular basis and if so what form should evolve? My experience in the governance of the IBO and the UWC suggests that a minimalist structure would be advisable with only as many rules and as much formal structure as is necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. The concept of an alliance is appealing. For example, one organisation could accept an administrative and coordinating function with a small but representative panel to plan and execute gatherings and programs. Rules are put in place to ensure transparency succession and accountability. However I accept that before walking down this path we may need to hasten slowly and ponder what obstacles we might meet along the way and where it is we want to be at the end of the journey. My only comment is to convey to you my concern that the need for action in the world around us is great and there are very few who share our passion and our vision.

Perhaps it is worth considering the progress that accountants have made in their well established global structures to advance a whole range of issues that have arisen as a result of the globalisation of corporations, trading patterns and the impotency of government regulation. On the other hand the practice of medicine is enhanced daily by stunning discoveries that have only been achieved through the enormously complex and effective international structures that profession has constructed to share information, carry out joint research and develop patterns of mutual professional support and understandings and influence policy on a wide range of issues. One could also consider a myriad of other professional and service organisations operating effectively within international structures. Are we satisfied that the field of education and in particular international education is keeping up with our professional colleagues? I suggest not.

Let me conclude my remarks by returning to the headmaster's speech day address. He quoted Vaclav Havel, a poet who became president of his country who in 1994 observed the recently emancipated countries of Eastern Europe gobbling up western capitalism as if it was the elixir of life, he wrote words which have turned out to be grimly prophetic:

'There are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, and it seems that something is on the way out and something else is being painfully born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying and exhausting itself, while something else still indistinct, arises from the rubble.'

We have seen the rubble of Manhattan just one year ago.

Havel went on to say:

'We may know immeasurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet it increasingly seems that they knew something more essential about it than we do ...'

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