

INTERPRETING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Geneva, 11 – 13 September 2002

CONFERENCE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The conference has had two basic aims:

- to widen and deepen our understanding ('interpretation' in the conference title) of international education
- to explore the possibility of creating an 'alliance' to bring together the different groups working in this field.

Much of the work of the past 48 hours has been done in the theme groups and it would be impertinent of me to try to summarise their rich presentations and discussions and even more so to try to knit the five different strands into an overarching framework.

Instead, we will start this session with a brief summary from each of the convenors of those strands: the history and nature of international education (Ian Hill), curriculum and assessment (Martin Skelton), professional development (Mary Hayden), the organization of schools and their communities (Terry Heywood) and the governance of international education (David Wilkinson).

(Brief summaries took place at this point: see separate document)

A RELEVANT EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Only those of us who live in Geneva can fully appreciate the symbolism of an event that happened earlier in the week. The cantonal flag, which flies over the Cathedral in the Old Town, alongside the white cross of the confederation, had been replaced by the blue and white flag of the United Nations. Switzerland and the United Nations were being displayed in public unity.

This would have been inconceivable even a year or two ago but it marked, of course, the formal entry of Switzerland into the General Assembly of the United Nations as the 188th member state. The Swiss decided some months ago, in a democratic referendum, to risk compromising (as they saw it) their much prized neutrality in order to participate more fully and more effectively in international affairs. This was seen to be a more relevant behaviour for our times and there has been no more powerful symbol of the way even the most entrenched attitudes can be changed.

In his address on Wednesday, Greg Crafter referred to a school speech day he had attended recently in Adelaide. He quoted from the headmaster's speech:

'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.'

I could not help contrasting this with the powerful passage in Vera Brittain's autobiography, *Testament of Youth*, where she describes attending her brother's final speech day at a famous independent school in England. Here, the chaplain preached a rather different message: one of patriotism, imperialism and sacrifice for one's country. On leaving school the young men set off for France, not on holiday, but for the trenches because this was 1914. Within a year most of them, including her fiancé, were dead.

Wilfred Owen, in a famous poem, condemned the kind of dangerously irrelevant education which helped to create, and then to sustain, the carnage of the First World War. He called it *'The old lie: dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'*. Owen, of course, was killed in 1918 just a week before the armistice.

I thought Cecilia Braslavsky's test, in her plenary presentation at this conference, was a good one for measuring the relevance of an education: ask what happened in later life to the pupil who was rated best in your class at school. In my case, nothing happened at all because he committed suicide during his first year at university.

I believe we all agree that an international education is a relevant education for the 21st century. Given the detailed discussions of the last two days, I am going no further in this summary than to say that such an education includes:

- the celebration of diversity
- an understanding of culture
- a study of global issues
- a recognition of different ways of developing understanding

and let me at this point recommend the novel *My Name is Red* by the Turkish author, Orhan Pamuk which, in its theme, style and especially its unusual structure immediately puts the reader into a new cultural setting – sixteenth century Istanbul and the world of book illustration. It is a wonderful account of the cultural clash between East and West in the depiction of reality, and especially of the human face, in illustrations.

Let me in passing draw brief attention to two omissions from the conference:

- I am always nervous when a conference on international education is entirely monolingual. We have not misled anyone – the conference was advertised as English only – but it contrasted with the drama production that we enjoyed at La Châtaigneraie earlier in the week. There I experienced a key moment when students chose to speak in two languages of which most of us had no knowledge: Hebrew and Urdu. What was our reaction: irritation, frustration or a determination to understand anyway, from the intonation and context?
- There seems to have been very little debate about the role of religious belief in international education, yet this is surely a key component in the determination of a person's culture. Let us flag this as a matter for future study.

I want to make amends for my earlier refusal to enter into the details of the definition of an international education by recommending what might become its handbook. I refer to *Learning: The Treasure Within*, the report of UNESCO's Delors commission. I find it increasingly helpful in its analysis of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live with others and learning to be. Note, incidentally, that the order is not random; only by achieving the first three can a person truly achieve her/his full potential as a human being.

BUILDING NETWORKS OF INFLUENCE

If we really believe that international education is a relevant education for the 21st century, then we need to promote it. Sir John Daniel drew our attention to our independence from governments, but this freedom comes with serious obligations. With no national support system, it is we, ourselves, who have to

- create the knowledge
- define the standards
- implement the procedures
- evaluate our achievements

At this point I put on my grandfather's hat, and let me suggest that grandparents of the world – who are living longer and healthier lives – should be listened to more seriously because we are generally rather more conscious of the dangers surrounding our grandchildren than we ever were with our children. When it comes to the degradation of the planet, for example, we hope our children might just get away with it, but our grandchildren most certainly will not, unless we act decisively.

Anyway, last week my grandson started school, a defining moment for him and, I suppose, for me too! What practical impact will international education have on him? Well, one thing is immediately apparent: education exists at two distinct levels:

- the *local level*: within the community of his school, its teachers, the pupils and their parents; at the moment that is what matters
- the *national level*: his primary school forms part of the state education system of the UK; this will matter later when he begins to move through the system

to which we have been adding a third, the *global level*. Since our emphasis during this conference has been on the global level (with plenary presentations, for example, from colleagues representing UNESCO, the IBE and the IBO/UWC, each one a global organization) it behoves us to remember that to have any significant impact, international education must begin at home, at the local and the national level.

Let me therefore suggest six areas that will need our attention in the promulgation of international education at each of these levels, local, national and global:

1. **We need a clear message.** I have written the following: *'One major contribution the IBO can make ... is to develop a language of international education. The language of national education is usually clear and powerful. It is concerned with national culture and national pride; with a national language or languages; with recognised qualifications; with clearly marked routes of academic progress and defined modes of access to further and higher education; with a nation's political machinery and its system for administration. All this is*

frequently translated into a national curriculum'. We have yet to develop a similarly clear and powerful language of international education.

2. **What medium do we use for this message?** Let me suggest that a more positive tone would sometimes help. The news that x billion people cannot read or write contains the implicit message that the problem is too great to resolve whereas the news that 'this week, y thousand more people can read than last week' contains a message of hope. I am surely not alone in wanting to be part of a winning team. Incidentally, I think we miss many opportunities to communicate popular information – on the back of cereal packets, for example, or in the metro, subway or underground as we stand there gazing across the tracks.
3. **How do you talk to governments?** As we explained earlier in the conference, the IBO does not lobby governments, but it is being invited to take part in a growing number of exchanges because most governments are concerned to add an international dimension to their national curricula.
4. **How do you influence teacher training?** In the IBO, we are coming to realise that our influence is exerted just as powerfully through our training workshops as it is through our formal programmes and we are deliberately building more resources into this aspect of our work. In the end, it is the relationship between my grandson and his class teacher that makes the difference.
5. **How do you influence the media?** If Rupert Murdoch really does control the world, what does he know about international education and who is taking the trouble to tell him about it?
6. **What is our track record?** Organizations begin to speak with authority when they have translated a good idea into a practical reality. Authority comes in two powerful forms, moral and pragmatic, and those working in international education have the capacity to display both.

AN ALLIANCE

In his opening address, Jeff Thompson explained the origins of this conference: a weekend seminar at Bath University that brought together representatives of organizations working in the field of international education: the CEIC at Bath, Oxford Brookes University, ECIS, Fieldwork, the UWCs and the IBO. There are, of course, many other organizations whose representatives have attended this conference including the European Schools, other tertiary institutions and the ISA.

We believe the moment has come to consider creating some kind of alliance between these groups so that we can better:

- develop new ideas
- share those ideas
- define and protect our position
- exert more effective influence for recognition

I find it hard to imagine that anyone in this conference hall has the time to devote to a new bureaucratic organization with committees, terms of reference, governing boards, minutes of meetings and a brass plaque on some expensive door. Instead, we need to go away from this conference and reflect upon the most appropriate structure for the proposed alliance.

Yes: it will need some rules, it will need a place (but that might be electronic), it will need some time and that means some money. But none of that need be suffocating. In particular it needs to be a genuine alliance with no single partner dominating its affairs. It needs to be placed somewhere between UNESCO, which is international education's formal lifeline to the governments of the world, including once again the United States, and the grassroots of international education which has been represented so powerfully at this conference.

None of us has the answers yet but we are all committed to go on working at it until we have proposals to make.

In his opening address, Sir John Daniel made reference to Gandhi's experience in prison, so let me come full circle by quoting Gandhi's version of the seven deadly sins that he insisted have affected human kind throughout history. After all, what characterises international education is its firm foundation on a set of values, so I will end by quoting what Gandhi warned us against:

- wealth without work
- pleasure without conscience
- knowledge without character
- commerce without morality
- science without humanity
- worship without sacrifice
- politics without principles

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