

INTERPRETING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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OPENING ADDRESS

Professor Jeff Thompson, University of Bath and IBO

Colleagues: as your conference Chair, it is my privilege and great personal pleasure to offer you a very warm welcome to this conference on Interpreting International Education. I believe the fact that we are fully subscribed - in fact we are over the numbers originally intended for the conference - is a clear indication not only of the interest in the processes of international education in which we are all fully engaged in one form or another, but also of the importance which each one of you attaches to the sharing of understanding of the nature of international education, and its dimension as a contribution to the achievement of a better world order. The origins of this conference lie in a seminar held just over a year ago at the University of Bath. A relatively small number of participants, but drawn from quite a wide diversity of experience in international education, gathered together for a couple of days under the joint auspices of the International Baccalaureate Research Unit and CEIC at the University of Bath to explore the extent to which claims made for the distinctive nature of an international education by schools, by universities and by other agencies and institutions could be justified. What does it mean for a curriculum, an assessment regime, an organisational dimension of an institution, a professional development programme to be international? Anyone here present will appreciate whilst the debate about the nature and purposes of international education was rapidly and enthusiastically engaged by those present on that occasion, solutions to the challenges identified were less evident. It was concluded, however, that the debate we were privileged to share together then would benefit from the greater range of experience that a much wider constituency could bring to it - and a notion that a conference should be organised for such a purpose was born.

That proposition was tested at a rather overcrowded session at the ECIS meeting in Nice last November (at which some of you here today were present, I know), and the idea for this conference was given substantial support. The result has been really very encouraging. Here today are well over 200 participants from schools of a wide range, national and international schools, state-funded and independently-funded schools, from universities, curriculum development centres, examination boards, government ministries, commercial companies that support the work of educational institutions with a wide range of services, and individuals from over forty countries. Thanks to you all the intention that these important issues, identified by the original seminar group, should be discussed in a much wider community has been given every chance of succeeding by your presence here this week. Thank you.

The structure of the conference has been designed to capitalise on that rich diversity of experience that quite clearly is represented here, which will assist in stimulating discourse debate and, I hope, a certain amount of discovery. As a catalyst for these discussions, we have invited to the conference three distinguished plenary speakers, the first of whom it will be my privilege to introduce to you all in a few moments. We have asked them to consider the issues at the centre of this conference, from the wider context of the experience that they

have and the current responsibilities which they deploy. We have quite purposefully made available a large proportion of the time over the next three days for discussion and debate within what we have termed the concurrent theme groups. These groups represent the main strands around which the debate concerning the nature and practice of international education, arising from that original seminar, was seen to be located. The intention is that within each of the theme groups – be it the History & Nature of International Education, Curriculum & Assessment, Professional Development, the Organisation of Schools & their Communities, or the Governance of International Education – that the issues should not only be raised and debated but that there should be a progression in a shared understanding of the dimension of internationalism within each of those themes.

We asked you to indicate in advance the theme group that you would wish to attend and to which you would wish to contribute. And that was not only for the purposes of planning room allocations, but was also to advise group convenors so that they may plan progression through the theme groups meeting on a developing basis. In other words, we hope that we shall see real progress amongst those constituting each of the theme groups so far as the development of an understanding of international education in the context of the group theme is concerned. To aid that development, it is the convenor's expectation that you will contribute to the development and progression of the group by staying with the chosen group so far as you feel able to do so. The convenors of the groups invited short contributions to their discussions, and those selected for that purpose – amounting to some fifty presentations in total – are indicated in the programme you have received. The convenors have put an enormous amount of work into the organisation of the theme groups, and I know that you will all support them in achieving the groups' aims. It is the intention that the outputs from the group and from these plenary meetings will bring together, for the first plenary session on Friday afternoon, the range of issues discussed and Professor George Walker has very kindly and generously agreed to present his impressions on what has been achieved over the three days of discussion and debate, and to lead a discussion himself on the kinds of activities and arrangements that this conference would like to see taken forward for the future.

Other features of the conference programme include a visit La Châtaigneraie School at the kind invitation of its Principal, Michel Chinal, for a reception, during which we shall have the opportunity to meet together in their newly created multi-media centre and to witness a drama presentation by the school students. During the next three days we shall also see the launch of a new research journal – the Journal of Research in International Education – a copy of which you have received in your conference bags, and also the launch of a new database – for researchers in the field of international education. They are both initiatives designed to support the growing body of research being undertaken in this area. We shall also, I hope, find time in the breaks, in the lunch times and after the day's activities close, to chat informally with one another and to enjoy ourselves! And with that in mind, I wish to remind you all that you are invited to, and indeed expected at, the conference dinner tomorrow evening, Thursday.

It has only been possible, colleagues, to make the arrangements for the conference in which we shall be engaged over the next three days, because of the tremendous efforts of a large number of people. They have been acknowledged in the programme which you have and I shall have the opportunity later in the conference to express once again the gratitude that they richly deserve. I would like to mention particularly however at this juncture those who, by their willingness to be patrons for the conference, have generously provided direct funding and have given additional support and encouragement in a number of ways. To

CES Holdings, the English Schools Foundation in Hong Kong, Fieldwork Education, Société d'Etudes Techniques et Economiques here in Geneva, Sage Publications and Sodexho, most of whom have representatives at this conference, we give our appreciation for all that you have made possible.

Someone writing to me before the conference, not that long ago, said it would be a real luxury to spend three days with experienced colleagues from around the world, coming together to share an understanding of international education, what it may be and how it can be applied to the practice in which we are involved day by day. I know what she meant about the opportunity to lift one's eyes and one's mind from the daily task of putting international education into practice and to share understanding and experience with others, but colleagues, it ought not to be a luxury. Wars and the rumours of wars that currently abound and the reminder that today's date – the 11th of September – gives to all of us of the violence that exists in our global society serve to underscore for me the necessity, not the luxury, of getting right, or as right as we can, the practice of international education in the manifest forms in which it currently exists, and the deliberate extension of that practice to a much wider world than we have so far been able to reach. It will also be important to know and to be able to recognise when we have got it right in such circumstances. The institutions and individuals present here constitute a significant reservoir of experience and understanding in international education. The time has come to draw on that resource and to share our experience more widely with one another, so that we may make our own contributions to the pursuit of peace throughout the world.

To set that process in train, it is now my very great pleasure to introduce our first plenary speaker, Sir John Daniel, who has most generously agreed to open the conference for us. Sir John will be known to all of you as Assistant Director General for Education at UNESCO, his current post which he has held since 2001, and to very many of you, if not all, as a recent Vice-President of the Council of Foundation of the IBO. He began his career as a metallurgist, and following a first class degree at Oxford and a doctorate from the University of Paris, his work in that field was acknowledged by awards from various and numerous learned societies. Whilst at the Ecole Polytechnique in the University of Montreal, Canada, his interest in teaching and learning became much more evident following further study in educational technology. And it was during a visiting lectureship at the then infant Open University, in the early 1970s in the UK, that his interest in distance education was kindled. From that point onwards he made unique contributions to the development of distance education and he rapidly established an international reputation as a powerful advocate and passionate practitioner of distance teaching. Throughout the 1970s and 80s he researched and published widely and held many posts of responsibility in both English language and French language universities, and was appointed to prominent positions on many national and international bodies that recognised his unrivalled knowledge of the field of distance education and his, by then, proven skills of chairmanship and presidency.

It seemed therefore a wholly natural move when, following a year which took him on study assignments to 25 countries on five continents, he was appointed in 1990 to the post of Vice Chancellor of the Open University in the UK, a position he was to fill for the following 11 years. During his time at the OU, the institution gained immensely in its reputation for both teaching quality and organisational and financial effectiveness. And its position today as a leading practitioner of e-learning on the world stage, for hundreds of thousands of students, can be directly attributed to his skills of leadership and his own academic and business expertise. Under his guidance the OU made links with over forty different countries and established a network of literally thousands of students taking OU courses in six languages

throughout the world. As a consequence of his distinguished work in the academic and professional educational fields, both nationally and world wide, he has received many awards and honours recognising the high quality of the contribution he continues to give. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1994 for his services to higher education and he holds honorary degrees from universities in ten different countries. We were delighted, therefore, as you may well imagine, when Sir John readily agreed to open the conference, for we know how great is his support for international education. He has chosen to address us today on the theme of 'International education in an era of globalisation - what's new?' Colleagues, will you please welcome Sir John Daniel.