

A personal view by Peter Zsebik

The Future of International Education

GOALS FROM THE PAST

After working for over a decade in the international school 'system', I sometimes ponder whether the current institutional imperatives of mass education are the most appropriate for today. There seems to be agreement that these concepts started in an earlier age (Beare and Slaughter, 1993) for reasons usually having to do with the socialisation of an individual for inclusion into that society (Lawton, 1975). To all appearances not much has changed



Throughout the last decade Peter has taught in a number of international schools throughout the world. His experiences within these academic settings laid the groundwork for his doctoral studies, which focused on the similarities and differences between different academic programs found in international schools. Peter is currently living in Toronto, Canada with his wife, two cats and one dog, and teaches English and Music at the senior school level.

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since those early days with regards to the structure, and most particularly, to the overall mission. As a business model, I believe the concept of a school is still serviceable, but the academic product of the school may be in need of some refinement for the 21st century.

Evidence of this need for refinement is seemingly more sensed than understood; many individuals within education have a tendency to reminisce while commenting on an apparent decline in educational relevancy. However, when pushed on the state of their educational soapbox, one may voice *examples* of the 'problems', but to actually pin down the *root* of those 'problems' can sometimes prove more difficult. Why is this so? Is it because developing a macro perspective of education's true focus for today's social context is not easily accomplished given the speed of social change and its increasing complexity? Does this then create an impending sense of unruliness for a system built on regulated efficiency? My feeling is that many current systems of education find it difficult to be 'in sync' with current social changes simply because these imperatives are from an earlier age.

This might sound like another war cry for educational change – and so it may well be. An

educational environment, if it is to serve the society in which it is placed, should by its very nature be able to have *both* the philosophical and practical flexibility to develop and grow with that society. Educational practices from the past may have appeared to be relatively successful, but to what extent can we continue to believe they are still appropriate for today's socio-political landscape?

I believe that if a self-perpetuating holding pattern is to be avoided, educators must learn to deconstruct their educational setting to acquire a clearer picture of their own macro environment. Part of the purpose of this deconstruction is to better understand the socio-political influences at work within both society and its relative academic environment. Further, educators must deduce how these influences shape the educational outcomes of the student and whether these outcomes help, or hinder, the goals of an 'international

education.'

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

Education will always need a goal or mission to direct the outcome of the learner. What can become problematic, however, is the perhaps (un)intentional recycling of the same goal or mission time after time, with very little but cosmetic change to suggest the notion of progress. This may have happened for a number of reasons, including perhaps ignorance, or ossification, or even the maintenance of a hegemonic focus for political ends. Regardless of the reason, however, I find no convincing argument to perpetuate this approach to education for today's society. But how does one break a cycle of this nature?

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Recognition of the academic situation is the first step. This is an all-encompassing process. We must look at all levels of society, ranging from the local to the international, to determine the issues and problems the student will face in the future. There will be guesswork in this process, but if there is a core of educational foresight, then we will be able to predict with some confidence the skills and knowledge bases a student will need when combined with the teaching of a critical-thinking and problem-solving process. Secondly, the importance of various curricular foci for the student could be determined by evaluating the socio-political constructs of an

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'international' setting. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the process of implementation. With this step, the educator must have a thorough understanding of how to create an educational outcome that is both transformative and international (Zsebik, 2003).

It would therefore appear that to accomplish a better understanding of a macro perspective for education, we need to focus on what might be termed the Paradigmatic curriculum of an institution (ibid., 2003). This Paradigmatic curriculum signifies not only the academic aspects of the institution, but the hidden and pastoral aspects as well. When given collective coherence, they create the paradigm under which that institution is operating, and this paradigm can be measured on a socio-political spectrum indicating the educational outcome that ranges from the hegemonic to the more appropriate transformative intellectualism (ibid., 2003).

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

'International education' as found in international schools and perhaps elsewhere can provide a potential direction for education. Its growing appearance beside other world systems of education may indicate a strong desire for participation in this brand (at least as advertised) of education, driven by a client base who may believe it could lead to a more fitting academic outcome for their child. In my experience international schools are well versed in working within a multicultural environment at a local through to an international level. Many

international schools have also adopted curricular programmes such as those of the International Baccalaureate Organization whose aim, as the previous Director General, Roger Peel pointed out, has shifted from being 'a curriculum for international schools' to developing 'an international curriculum for schools' (Wallace, 1997). This shift in emphasis is important as it indicates a sensitivity to changes occurring within the educational landscape – one that is focused on developing an international-mindedness in the student.

'This shift in emphasis is important'

What is of danger to this process, however, is the risk of disregarding the notion of an 'international education' catering to national/imperialistic political agendas. Something of this nature would be contraindicated to the overall aims of an 'international education' paradigm; any policy adoption other than an international education paradigm serves no one's best interest, particularly the students', who will come away with a confused concept of what it means to be part of an international society.

To this end, it is my belief that an educational environment servicing an international community must strive to create an international perspective addressing the needs and concerns of that socio-political setting. The seeds of this type of educational landscape can be found scattered throughout the international school community, and it is there we can perhaps find the solutions mass education may be looking for to become once more a directional rather than a historical force for our society.

References

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