

A personal view by Perci Monyatsi

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: ARE THE DEVELOPING

Much as literature abounds with anecdotes and case studies that suggest international education as the answer to the problems that bedevil education systems the world over, as a citizen of a developing country I believe that most if not all developing countries are not yet ready for it. Up till now the majority of developing countries are still grappling with the desire to have most of their citizens educated in ordinary local schools. The advent of international education for developing countries may be more likely to spell disaster than to be a panacea.

Properly planned, with relevant structures in place plus committed support in a conducive environment, international education is a fascinating concept. Mason (1998:3) contends that there are a good many economic, socio-political and technological reasons underpinning current developments in education around the world. Firstly, in an ideal scenario, access is guaranteed. "Whether potential students be geographically remote, time constrained, financially constrained, house-bound, disabled, or simply unable to find a course on the subject they want locally, there exist largely unmet educational needs which every research report, policy study and educational analysis



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specialist courses can be made available to many people including those who are in remote areas. This is even more the case with audio-conferencing and computer conferencing. Thirdly, Mason (1998:6) posits that "a good many areas of the curriculum are inherently global in nature and some particularly lend themselves to course development on an international scale, providing students with a much broader perspective than a course presented by a single institution".

As Cambridge (2000) argues, international schools and other schools offering international education operate in a context of increasing globalization, which has been described as the widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life. With globalization now driving the economic domain, education as a driving

force of economic development also has to align to the current trends. According to Swiniarski, Breitborde and Murphy (1999:4), the aim of global education "is to promote the knowledge base, skills and attitudes that permit the young child to see the world as a community while appreciating the mosaic of cultures in his/her immediate neighbourhood, town or city". Furthermore, children need to feel that they are part of the world community and be able to accept the differences among cultures. Tye (1990:5) describes global education as "seeing things through the eyes and minds of others – and it means the realisation that while individuals and groups may view life differently, they also have common needs and wants". Global education emphasises access to equal and equitable education as a human right. Global education is

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shows are increasing" (Mason, 1998:4). New technologies are making it easier to reach out to people anywhere, and at any time. Secondly, the expertise of the few, educational resources, and

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Computers are the main tools and students have to be comfortable with technology as they use it in their play and work. According to Swiniarski *et al* (1999), the technology highway links children through electronic mail and conferencing; distance education, daily conferencing with satellites, mapping the world and beyond with remote sensing, as well as probing the mysteries of the universe, are some of the tasks technology addresses in a global curriculum. International education is indeed beneficial to the current global village.

Although a marvellous intervention, international education can be problematic in developing countries for a number of reasons. International education does not come cheap and it is expensive for the majority of citizens of developing countries, most of whom live in the rural areas. Governments cannot afford to place international education in the public domain not only because of its high cost, but also because, by its nature, it is seen as elitist and popularising foreign cultures and values. The success of international education is mostly based on the accessibility to both learners and educators of information and communications technology. Rural areas, most of which are remote in developing countries, do not have electricity. This is made worse by the fact that the notion of *remoteness* in developing countries is not only distance oriented but also *facility* oriented. That is, remote areas are those that do not have facilities such as electricity and piped water.

‘international education can be problematic in developing countries’

It has also been realised that although the transformation brought about by international education offers many potential benefits to developing and transition countries, increasing reliance on digital information and advanced communication technologies carries, at the same time, the real danger of a growing digital gap among and within nations (World Bank, 2002), which may result in large populations being marginalised. The World Bank report emphasises this by declaring that, within countries, the advent of technology often means that groups which were already

disadvantaged or excluded – low-income families, rural populations, women, minorities and the elderly – fall further behind. In countries such as Botswana, this may mean that those such as the Baswara who were marginalised through the advent of western education will lag behind further. Because not all citizens of developing countries can afford the high fees and the other amenities that go with it, and because governments are not in a position to subsidise it, international education may lead to social stratification as those who manage to experience it are favoured by employers and tertiary institutions.

‘they are not yet ready for it’

It is for all these reasons that I argue that developing countries are not yet ready to embrace international education. They should rather, in my view, intensify their efforts to make more local forms of education available to all their citizens and make their curricula more responsive to the needs of their people. I would not wish readers to believe I am arguing that international education has nothing to offer to the developing countries; on the contrary, it has. It is just that they are not yet ready for it.

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