The Future of International Education

Introduction

Schools claiming to offer an international education have multiplied steadily since World War II. The drivers of this growth have been the emergence of large expatriate communities in major cities and the ambitions of many local parents to groom their offspring for entry to universities and employment around the world. Less significant numerically, but vital to the advancement of the concept and practice of international education, are the international schools inspired by aspirations for a better world, notably the United World Colleges (UWC). I declare an interest as the *pro bono* chair of the UWC International Board.

Half a century ago an international school from each of these categories (École Internationale de Genève and UWC Atlantic) collaborated in the creation of the International Baccalaureate. They needed a school-leaving qualification that would be acceptable for entry to universities internationally whilst also giving pupils a wider view of the world than they could get from their national curricula. This book tells how the IB has developed over subsequent decades, a process that I was privileged to observe as a member of the IB's Council of Foundation during the 1990s. IB schools multiplied and diversified rapidly during that period, which also saw the emergence of the Middle-Years and Primary-Years IB programmes.

This short essay speculates about the future of international education in times that are very different from those that stimulated the emergence of the IB 50 years ago. The UK's 2016 referendum campaign about its international future was tainted with xenophobia. This theme resonated with older and less-educated voters and the UK voted by 52% to 48% to quit the EU, although 75% of younger voters wanted to stay in the EU. The current president of the US is an unpredictable populist who has little time for international agreements such as the Paris Climate Change agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement.

These may be extreme manifestations of changing attitudes, because the populist trend seems to be weakening in Europe, but on almost any measure globalisation, which has underpinned the dynamics of national and international affairs for decades, is now in retreat. Trade agreements are increasingly difficult to secure, despite their proven benefits for prosperity. In politics, the Enlightenment-inspired consensus that led to the creation of the UN and the Universal Charter of Human Rights after World War II has lost its force. Multilateralism is out of fashion. Youngsters with an international education will now have to swim against the current instead of being hailed as harbingers of a better future.

How will international education evolve in this changing context? Although international schools come in many forms, we shall divide them into just two broad categories. In the first group are market-sensitive fees-supported schools driven primarily by the desire of

richer parents to see their children prosper - often by moving to another country for higher education and maybe staying there. In the second are schools inspired by a vision of a better world, which depend heavily on philanthropy. Schools of both types will continue to use the IB, which means that a challenge for the IB's future development is not merely to cater to both camps, but to help bridge the gap between them.

We shall comment on the dilemmas facing each type of school and conclude with suggestions about how the IB might evolve in ways that will help all international schools to resolve them.

Fees-supported schools

The challenge for international schools catering to wealthy expatriate and local parents is to give their pupils the ability to cope with the likely dynamics of the mid-21st century world in which they will live. This will require an ability to work with a diversity of people on the issues of the times, notably inequality and the mass movement of people across the world. Diversity is a key theme. Long gone are the days when diversity could be measured by counting the different passports held by pupils. As a Swazi boy chairing a discussion among a seemingly very diverse pupil panel at the UWC 2013 Congress put it: 'We are all middle-class liberals'.

While a good curriculum can help, the best way to prepare for a diverse world is to experience it. In my own schooldays in the UK we studied the rivers of India and the American Civil War, but it was not an international education. At a time when the great divide, as much within countries as between them, is inequality of wealth, pupils cannot aspire to be world citizens without some experience of 'how the other half lives'. This applies equally to rich children and to poor children. The main challenge for these international schools is to arrange their financial model to diversify their intake of pupils on the criterion of wealth by introducing 'Robin Hood' policies. These are already widespread in the better examples of national private schools.

Vision-centred schools

We shall take the United World Colleges as our example of international schools based on the ideal of uniting people for peace and a sustainable future. Starting from a single school (Atlantic College) 50 years ago, the UWC movement now counts 17 institutions around the world. Even more important for the achievement of its vision are the UWC national committees over 150 countries. These groups, mostly made up of volunteer alumni, are responsible for recruiting the 'deliberately diverse' intake of pupils for the institutions. Their interpretation of diversity is constantly evolving, with nationality, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality and family income all playing a part. The movement is now organising itself to take a greater number of refugees and is putting in place the additional pastoral care required for these often-traumatised pupils.

Because most UWC students are fully or substantially subsidised from philanthropic sources, the income and diversity challenges for UWC are the mirror image of those facing the fees-supported schools, namely what proportion of wealthier and full-fee-paying pupils should UWC institutions take? The conditions for joining the UWC system now include guidelines on this.

At the IB Diploma level each UWC institution brings together a few hundred pupils from all over the world to live together for two years in a boarding environment, usually sharing a bedroom with three others from different countries. Independently of the curriculum on offer, living in this way is a powerful international education in itself. Moreover, the educational experience at each UWC not only includes a more extensive Creative Action and Service (CAS) programme than is mandated by the IB Diploma, but also gives pupils greater responsibility for the conception and execution of the CAS activity than is commonplace elsewhere.

All this comes together in the UWC educational model that has been developed collectively by the UWC institutional heads over that last two years (Figure 1) with experiential learning as a unifying theme. At present the IB Diploma is a key element in this model but, as we note below, some in the UWC wonder if it should not develop its own diploma, covering the whole educational model, if the IB Diploma continues to expand its calls on pupils' time.

How should the IB evolve?

How can the IB better serve its member schools in this challenging era? We make three points.

First, the IB curricula cannot provide all the answers to these challenges and should not try to do so. We have argued that many of the initiatives needed to secure a relevant future for international education must be generated within the schools themselves. The UWC movement defines its educational model as IB+, but UWC institutions often complain that the increasing demands of the IB Diploma leave less and less room for the '+'.

Second, the IB should continue to ensure that its aspirations to inculcate critical thinking go beyond conventional educational waffle. Recently *The Economist* commented that 'in the post-truth politics that are rocking Western democracies, illusions are more alluring than authority', noting later 'the inadequacy of the left-right partisan spectrum in an age when open-closed is a more salient divide'. Alumni of international schools should be equipped to speak truth to power - and to their fellow citizens.

Third, the IB must grasp the nettle of making its programmes available online. An attempt to do this in the early 2000s was partly stymied by pushback from the IB schools, which considered that the IB was a key element of their elite brand. They did not want to see it made more generally available and so a rather timid project produced some online

versions of some IB courses that could only be taken by children already in IB schools. This missed the essential point, because in the early 2000s the aim had been to widen access to IB courses to the public at large.

This over-cautious attitude to the rapidly expanding online world is unfortunate. If the IBO does not create robust mechanisms for offering quality K-12 programmes online at scale it is certain that others, most likely with less curricular depth than the IB, will do so instead. One place for the IB to start could be an online version of the Theory of Knowledge course, offered free worldwide, in the style of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). This could help to counter, in a modest way, the 'post-truth' attitudes that are infecting political and media discourse around the world.

Good international education is more important than ever. As politicians retreat into their nationalisms, the cohesion, peace and sustainability of our world will depend on people whose education has given them the experience and the knowledge to stand up for internationalism and speak truth to power.

Sir John Daniel, O.C.
Chair, UWC International Board
2017-09-04