

Intercultural Sensitivity in international schools

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Abstract

This paper aims to outline how the issues of cultural diversity and global harmony intersect in international schools. Many schools, not just international schools, are aware of the need to provide a framework for an emerging global structure that is not based on prejudice and privilege. The study is informed by the belief that "...For nearly two centuries, the citizens of modern nations have possessed a secular faith in the power of educational institutions to bring about increasingly "better" societies through the "improvement" of their young." (Lagemann & Shulman 1999). The citizens of these nation states may have disagreed over what type of society and citizen educational institutions should be shaping, "...but they have not lost faith, fundamentally, in the potential of pedagogy to produce this imagined future." (op. cit.). The rise of mass compulsory schooling has from the start been interconnected with the process of nation building. One of the major transformations that globalisation has forced on educators is the reduction in significance of the nation state and the emergence of an increasingly global culture. "As supranational forces threaten the nation from without, the rise of localism and of social movements and policies emphasizing local control and decentralization have shifted political and economic relations within nation-states."(op. cit.).

There are, in reality, no recognized philosophical foundations underpinning the many international schools that exist today. A common thread is that recognition of diversity and international connectedness will lead to a more cohesive global understanding (Landis *et al*, 2004). It is an underlying belief of this paper, that in a rapidly globalising world, all classrooms share some common attributes. The emergence of the internet and other forms of information technology have changed the face of the classroom forever. The study will draw on student and staff perspectives, their intercultural conflict styles, as well as school policies and curriculum to make preliminary findings and provide direction for future research in this new and under-explored field.

An international comparative perspective on international schools is used to develop an understanding of the dynamics involved in intercultural issues as might apply over a range of contexts, with diverse cultural mixes and cultural settings.

The primary outcome of this paper is to identify the supportive factors that will enable a wider community of schools to assess their role in the promotion of inter-cultural understanding. It is anticipated that this research will encourage a more comprehensive interest amongst teachers, schools and academics to engage in research on the fostering of tolerance and understanding.

Résumé

Interculturalisme dans les écoles internationales

Cet article vise à décrire comment les questions de la diversité culturelle et de l'harmonie globale interagissent dans les écoles internationales.

L'une des plus grandes transformations, que la mondialisation a imposée aux enseignants, est l'émergence d'une culture de plus en plus globale.

Nombreuses sont les écoles (pas seulement internationales), qui se rendent compte de la nécessité de fournir un cadre pour une structure globale naissante qui ne soit pas basée sur le préjugé et le privilège.

Il y a, en réalité, aucune tradition philosophique sous-jacente, soutenant les écoles internationales qui existent actuellement. Un fil commun les relie : la reconnaissance d'une diversité et d'une connexion internationale menant à un arrangement global plus cohésif (Landis *et al*, 2004). L'émergence d'Internet, et des autres types d'information technologique, ont changé pour toujours le visage de salle de classe.

L'étude a pour objet de dessiner, à partir de perspectives émises par les étudiants et le personnel se servir des étudiants, et professeurs, leur mode d'interculturalité, même les politiques et curricula pour faire des directions pour nouveau recherché dans cette domaine mal explorer.

Un comparision internationale sur les écoles internationale est utilise pour developper un comprehension sur les dynamics que constitue les problems de question d'interculturalité, avec les divers et assorti cultures.

Les résultats premiers de cette recherche sont d'identifier les facteurs de support qui permettront, à une communauté plus large des écoles, d'évaluer leur rôle dans la promotion de l'arrangement interculturel. On prévoit que cette recherche encouragera un intérêt plus complet chez les professeurs, des écoles comme des universités, à s'engager dans la recherche sur la stimulation de la tolérance et la compréhension.

Much is expected from schools as we advance into the 21st Century. The provision of the basic skills of writing, reading and arithmetic have almost taken second place to hidden agenda items such as providing a platform to leap off into the world of work, ranking students performance against international guidelines and helping create an environment of peace and cooperation that will eventually create a tolerant and humane world society. In today's economic rationalist environment where all phases of civic society must be broken into measurable and preferably profitable outcomes, these outcomes are difficult to measure. Jerome Bruner (1996, p. IX) writes, "that education is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing. What we resolve to do in school makes no sense when considered in the broader context of what society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young". One of the most liable schools or group of schools must surely be those that are considered international schools. These small but influential clusters of schools have the potential to lead national schools into the promised land of 'global citizenship' (UNICEF, 1991), 'education for international understanding'

(UNESCO, 1968), and 'world mindedness' (Sampson & Smith, 1957). This paper looks at the task ahead and the journey travelled so far in the promotion of mutual understanding and cross-cultural education from the perspective of some fifty teachers and twenty students interviewed at a variety of international schools.

Introduction

Cambridge & Thompson (2004) contend that "internationalist" and "globalist" approaches are rarely seen in their pure form and that international education as it is practiced in international schools is the reconciliation of these contrasting approaches¹. Starr (1979) documented the growth of a nationwide campaign in the USA to 'internationalise' education, and proposed the establishment of specialist 'International High Schools' which, while teaching all the normal courses, would place special emphasis on foreign languages and the international dimension of such subjects as history, economics, geography and sociology. Not much became of this proposal. Much has been written to define and establish once and for all exactly what constitutes an international school. Terwilliger (1972) perceived there to be four main requisites for a school to be classified as international: the enrolment of a significant number of students not citizens of the country the school is located (but not all from one other country), a board of directors made up of 'foreigners and nationals in roughly the same proportions as the student body being served', a teaching body made up of teachers who have themselves 'experienced a period of cultural adaptation', and a curriculum which is a distillation of the best content and the most effective instructional practices of each of the national systems'. Matthews (1988) attempted to define what constituted international schools by defining their 'observable characteristics' and rejected Terwilliger's earlier defined pre-requisites. An attempt by Leach (1969) to categorise international schools focused on the dichotomy between expatriate and local populations and the possible ensuing gap created between privilege and under-privilege, on the problem of language of instruction and curriculum choice.

The 1964 Yearbook of Education identified approximately 50 international schools while Leach estimated that by 1969 there were at least 300.000 students in a variety of international schools. Leach proposed a four-fold categorisation of these schools. The first served students of several nationalities, secondly those 'overseas' schools serving the expatriate community of a particular nation, thirdly those founded by joint action of two or more national groupings and fourthly those schools affiliated to the International Schools Association (ISA)², which had as their aim the educating of 'young people to be at home in the world anywhere'. Leach's hierarchical model suggested that some schools were more international than others. Sanderson (1981) doubled Leach's estimate of the student body of

¹ For an overview of the relationship between international schools and international education see Hayden and Thompson (1995).

² The other major organization dealing with international schools was the European Council of International Schools (ECIS). Both the ISA and ECIS were heavily involved, and indeed still are, in the recruitment of staff, staff development, accrediting of international schools and all of the other activities undertaken by local educational authorities in a national school system.

international schools and stretched the classification system to seven. He added regional or bi-national schools such as the nine European Community Schools, those based on two educational traditions and 'Internationally minded schools. Matthews (1988) estimated that the number of international schools had swelled to over 1,000 with 50,000 teachers and half a million students. Ponisch (1987) had extended the classification of international schools to 11 including those founded as international schools, which have "consistently tried to develop and practice a distinctive form of international education". Schools such as the United Nations School in Hanoi and the United World Colleges, schools which do not offer the Advanced Certificate of Education (AICE) or International Baccalaureate (IB), but which "claim to be international because their students come from many countries". Then there were national overseas schools founded to serve one national or linguistic group, The French Lycée of Sydney or the Japanese School of London, and schools offering international programmes such as the AICE or IB originally firmly rooted in a national tradition.

The classification of international schools into ever wider categories can be helpful but as Gellar (1981) suggests a more general distinction such as a school that welcomes pupils of many nationalities and cultures, that recognises such pupils have differing aims and actively adjusts its curriculum to meet those aims is all that is needed³. The four international schools used in this study were chosen specifically for a number of reasons. The first located in Sydney, Australia, the International Grammar School (IGS), is a medium sized private school concentrating its curriculum on the development of language at the junior and middle school with bi-lingual instruction from K-6. The second in San Francisco, the French American International School, is an independent, bilingual, coeducational day school. The third in Vietnam, the United Nations International School of Hanoi (UNIS-Hanoi), has developed programmes that recognize the importance of involving the whole family in the transition process to new schools. It is recognised as a dynamic example of an international school that has grown in an economically developing nation. The fourth school, College-Lycée Cévenol International, France, has been chosen because of its historical role as a school founded by Pacifists. Cévenol aims to foster world peace by bringing together people of many origins. These schools provide examples of different international schools with the ability to provide those potential factors that help create tolerance and understanding between students. As is evident, these schools are located in diverse environments. By studying these schools at a micro-level, issues of how international schools foster notions of tolerance and understanding through cultural diversity can be explored and analysed within the school context. This study outlines how the issues of cultural diversity and global harmony intersect in international schools. Many schools, not just international schools, are aware of the need to provide a framework for an emerging global structure that is not based on prejudice and privilege.

³ For a more detailed summary of the range of international schools Hayden and Thompson's (1995) summary is excellent as is the more recent Cambridge and Thompson (2004) article Internationalism and globalization as contexts for international education.

Background

The study is informed by the belief that "...For nearly two centuries, the citizens of modern nations have possessed a secular faith in the power of educational institutions to bring about increasingly "better" societies through the "improvement" of their young." (Lagemann & Shulman 1999). The citizens of these nation states may have disagreed over what type of society and citizen educational institutions should be shaping, "...but they have not lost faith, fundamentally, in the potential of pedagogy to produce this imagined future." (Lagemann & Shulman *op. cit.*). The rise of mass compulsory schooling has from the start been interconnected with the process of nation building. One of the major transformations that globalisation has forced on educators is the reduction in significance of the nation state and the emergence of an increasingly global culture. "As supranational forces threaten the nation from without, the rise of localism and of social movements and policies emphasizing local control and decentralization have shifted political and economic relations within nation-states" (Lagemann & Shulman, *op. cit.*).

There are, in reality, no recognized philosophical foundations underpinning the many international schools that exist today. There are many categories of international schools (Fox, 1985). A common thread is that recognition of diversity and international connectedness will lead to a more cohesive global understanding (Landis *et al*, 2004). It is an underlying belief of this study, that in a rapidly globalising world, all classrooms share some common attributes. The emergence of the Internet and other forms of information technology has changed the face of the classroom forever. This study is predicated on the belief that all schools are now more likely to be international in their outlook. While not all student and staff populations are as diverse as some of the 'enclave' schools mentioned by Fox (*op. cit.*) and Hayden and Thompson (1998), the need for all schools to be global in their perspective is paramount.

This study explores those factors associated with greater awareness of cultural difference that are responsible for increased levels of tolerance. The study draws on student and staff perspectives, staff methods of dealing with conflict (intercultural conflict styles), as well as school policies and curriculum to make preliminary findings and provide direction for future research in this new and under-explored field. Does, for example, the introduction of a program or programs, such as those offered by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) provide schools with genuine tools for dealing with the complex job of equipping students of the 21st century a path or framework for future conflict resolution as well as entry into the labor market?

Theoretical Perspective

Much of the research undertaken on intercultural sensitivity has focused on individuals and how they adapt to different cultural environments. Little research has been done on how schools, in particular international schools, deal with intercultural tension. It is important to mention at this stage of the paper, that the four schools chosen for this study were not chosen because they have problems.

In fact, the opposite is probably a more realistic appraisal of the schools selected. A review of the research relating to intercultural sensitivity of individuals or groups of individuals, often exchange students, suggests that there are three psychological approaches to the study of culture contact. These may be summarised as:

- the culture learning approach,
- the stress and coping approach,
- and the social identification approach. Ward (2004, p. 187)

Ward prefaces her outline of the three theories by acknowledging that 'Researchers cannot promise to deliver unassailable theory or unequivocal empirical outcomes that can address all questions in all contexts' (*Ibid.*). This study is in congruence with her and further accepts that intercultural study is better informed with guiding theory than without it. The use of intuitive appealing psychological premises or even sheer 'common sense' can lead into unanticipated pitfalls. Ward gives the example of cross-cultural transition and adaptation as developed in popular books on 'culture shock' and the U-curve of adaptation. This account of the cross-cultural sojourn as a case of "cultural shock" was popularised by Oberg (1960) although the work was preceded by an earlier study by Lysgaard (1955) on Scandinavian Fulbright grantees in the United States of America.

The culture learning approach concentrates on the processes by which people acquire culturally relevant skills to survive and thrive in their new environments and to interact effectively across cultural lines. Attributed to the early work of Argyle and Kendon (1967), this approach suggests that the social behaviours of interacting persons represent a mutually skilled performance and that interpersonal friction results when the performance breaks down. This is usually due to one (or more) of the participants being unable to regulate the social encounter skilfully. The differences between cultural groups in language of communication and rules for social behaviours and conventions customs means that there is a much greater risk of unsuccessful, confusing and unpleasant experience in intercultural encounters. International schools provide a potentially treacherous arena for such intercultural conflict.

The cross-cultural tension between groups is diminished when the contact cultures are similar. The majority of research undertaken on intercultural sensitivity is overwhelmingly European / Western focused. More specifically, students from the culturally "far" group (Middle Eastern and Asian countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Japan) experienced more difficulties than those from the "intermediate" group (Southern European and South American countries such as Italy, Spain, Venezuela, and Brazil) and the "near" group (Northern European countries such as France, the Netherlands, and Sweden). Ward and Kennedy's (1999) research converges with these findings and suggests that cultural and ethnic similarity is generally associated with fewer sociocultural difficulties. (Ward, 2004, pp. 189-190)

Berry (1997) popularised the stress and coping approach in his review of acculturation, immigration, and adaptation. He highlighted the significance of life changes during cross-cultural transitions, the appraisal of these changes, and the

selection and implementation of coping strategies to deal with them. Janet Baker⁴ referred to students in her experience "sticking with their own".

... in my experience from seeing these students in this school I think that on the whole they do work really well across cultures. I think particularly grade 11 and 12, I'm really impressed with the way, you know, in the same class you've got a complete mix of nationalities working together and integrating really well. Perhaps there are, and that's in the majority, there are a few who withdraw and just want to stick with their own. I think in a sense that's only natural.

Ward (*op. cit.*) finds that on the macrolevel, characteristics of the society of origin and the society of settlement are important. Discriminating features of these societies may include social, political, and demographic factors such as ethnic composition, the extent of cultural pluralism, and salient attitudes toward ethnic and cultural out-groups. Ward asserts that on the microlevel, characteristics of the acculturative experience exert influences on stress, coping and adaptation. She draws on the earlier work of Berry who distinguishes between influences arising prior to and during culture contact⁵. The importance of such factors as personality or cultural distance prior to cultural contact and social support and acculturation strategies after cultural contact is clearly supported by the data produced in this study. Stephanie Brown had this to say about the difference cultural distance can make to individual students in her school.

I think in an international setting it actually is a lot easier than it is in a public setting, because I know I have seen less issues here than I did back in Toronto with the interracial, intercultural interactions between students. I think here the students are a lot more aware because they're not living in their home country, they're living in a host country and many of them lived elsewhere before they came here.

The final approach, social identification, is concerned with cognitive aspects of culture contact and emphasises the significance of identity and its implications for intergroup perceptions and relations. The theories within this domain are multifaceted and concentrate on the measurement of identity; identity development, maintenance, and change; the relationship between identity and acculturation strategies; and the cognitive processes underlying inter-group perceptions and relations (Ward, 2004, pp. 189-190). Ward points out that this approach is not as straight forward as the other two with a single theory to unify the field. The boundaries of the cognitive approaches to acculturation are fuzzier and more permeable than the affective (stress and coping) framework and the behavioural (culture learning) approach (Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 195).

⁴All teachers interviewed in this study signed a consent form agreeing to be interviewed while remaining anonymous. In order to ensure their privacy, they have all been given pseudonyms.

⁵Much of the work relating to the stress and coping approach has been undertaken by researchers concerned with short term cultural exchanges such as Zheng and Berry's (1991) study of Chinese sojourners in Canada. Another study by Chataway and Berrys (1989) of Hong Kong Chinese and French and Anglo-Canadians had similar findings. For a more complete account of expectation-experience discrepancies see Landis *et al.* (2004, pp. 192-194)

The three theoretical frameworks identified above stress different aspects of intercultural sensitivity. The first, culture learning, stressed the importance of cultural skills and introduced the construct of sociocultural adaptation. As Janet Baker stressed in the earlier quote, students at international schools seem particularly apt at dealing with sociocultural adaptation. The second stress and coping emphasized the emotional components of culture contact, especially psychological adjustment during cross-cultural transition. Social identification, the third framework, dealt with selected elements of social identity, acculturation processes, and intergroup perceptions and relations⁶.

Research Questions

There were a number of key questions guiding the research project. How do curricula in particular the International Baccalaureate Organisation's (IBO) Junior Years Programme (JYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP), student and teacher intercultural conflict styles and levels of student and teacher involvement in intercultural issues, influence positive school outcomes? What do teachers and students believe are the supportive factors that schools need to create an 'atmosphere of tolerance and understanding' in schools and classrooms? Where does the process of 'convergence of ideas and cultural differences' take place in international schools?

Participants

The project investigated four international schools. The schools selected had a wide diversity of students from all over the world. All were English speaking or bilingual schools with a large number of students with Non English Speaking Background (NESB) and a faculty with a diverse array of nationalities and experiences. The selected schools used a variety of different curricula. The International Baccalaureate Organization's (IBO) Junior Years Program (JYP) and Middle Years Program (MYP) was used by UNIS Hanoi. The French American School of San Francisco used the French Baccalaureate and International Baccalaureate as well as the American High School Graduation certificate. The International School of Sydney used the New South Wales Higher School Certificate and the Lycée International de Cévenol used the French Baccalaureate. The participants in the study were self-selected. The contact person in the schools circulated an email to staff and students with a brief summary of the project asking for those who were interested in taking part to sign up on a white board or contact the researcher through email or phone. The interviews were generally done over a four-day period with student focus groups taking place during breaks or in some instances after school.

⁶Intercultural training specialists have undertaken the majority of research undertaken in the field of intercultural sensitivity. Organisations such as the Intercultural Communication Institute in Portland Oregon run courses for workers employed by multinational organizations that assist in the placement of workers into foreign countries. As mentioned earlier in this paper, very little work has been done on intercultural sensitivity in international schools.

Research Design and Data collection

This project took place over a 20-month period. Qualitative data was collected through a series of interviews with staff and through focus groups with students. The number of interviews with staff varied from school to school. Focus groups were used for the students in their 10th and 11th years of schooling (n=6-8 per focus group). The interviews and focus groups were conducted on the school premises and were audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews were semi-structured and addressed a range of questions, allowing teachers and students to identify what they saw as the key issues. Focus groups enable the researcher to gather large amounts of information in a limited period of time. In working with students focus groups offer participants a safe environment where they can share experiences, beliefs and attitudes in the company of their peers. Focus groups with young people are a less intimidating research method than the individual face-to-face interviews. (Lagemann & Schulman, 1999). Some schools were visited twice enabling follow up interviews while others could only be visited once.

Summary of Findings

The interviews carried out were transcribed and their responses were grouped into response categories. Teachers of primary and secondary students were not differentiated nor were gender differences made. Student focus groups were similarly transcribed and responses grouped according to categories developed during the data collection phase of the project. "The research process, though it can occur in a rambling manner, is best done systematically by following certain operating rules" (Charles, 1998 p. 13). Research in international schools is problematic. Schools are often located in locations that make visiting more than once difficult. The school at Cévenol is located in Chambon sur Lignon in the mountainous region of the Auvergne. Making it there by public transport is a major challenge. The other three schools in Hanoi, San Francisco and Sydney were more accessible. The principle of generalizability implies that findings of research can be applied or generalized to other individuals and settings. As noted in the introduction to this paper, international schools are difficult to categorise and making assumptions about how other schools will deal with similar problems is not straightforward. Holmes (1981, p. 36) notes, "Too many decisions, prepared by planners and adopted by those who employ them, are presented as valid panaceas". There are no universal panaceas to the creation of 'global citizenship' or 'education for "international understanding"'. The research undertaken in this study does offer some suggestions based on the experiences of teachers and students at international schools, arguably the cutting face for dealing with intercultural understanding and the creation of a harmonious planet.

Educational purposes and processes have been directed toward ensuring national unity and social integration through passing on a purportedly shared national culture, transmitting democratic values and ideals, and providing the skills and credentials required by the economic structure of each nation-state, capitalist or socialist... Debates about educational purposes and practices,

however, are taking on new meaning and significance in this era of globalization (Lagemann, & Shulman, *op. cit.*, p. 122).

The questions driving this project may be grouped into three categories. They revolve around teachers, students, and curricula. The interview responses below are indicative of overall trends or clusters of responses and represent the direction of the majority of replies to questions. Not all those interviewed would be in agreement with the majority position as would be expected in any study of this nature. The two major actors considered in this project then were teachers and students. Some of the teachers interviewed were also parents of students at the school and often spoke as a representative of one or the other category but there were insufficient interviews with parents to justify a separate category.

The Teachers

It is difficult to distinguish the difference between a teacher in an international school and a teacher in a national⁷ school. Generally the international teacher starts off being trained in his or her own country of origin and then after a period of teaching they gain a position in an international school. Not all teachers making the transition stay in international schools but many, like Jacques, do and find it difficult to imagine returning to their own country to teach again.

... So I studied in France, in Paris, got my teaching credentials there. Studied two years in Paris and moved in 1981 to San Francisco. So for many years I was just teaching world history and Geography for 3-4 years and after I became Head of Department for Humanities and after the Director of French studies so I still teach but only 4 hours per week. So I am as you can see basically taking care of a lot of paper.

Jacques is unusual in staying in the one school as most teachers working in international schools move fairly regularly, 2-3 years is typical of a length of stay in an international posting. Many schools offer bonuses at the end of a contract of two years to ensure teachers stay for a minimum of two years. More typical of a career path of an international school teacher is that of Lauren, in her fifth year teaching in Hanoi. Lauren completed her compulsory schooling and university education in Canada. She then had several teaching experiences.

... and after that I started to teach on an Indian reservation in northern Canada, which is a fly-in reserve. No roads leading there, and I taught there for one year. After that I flew over to England and took a ... course at the University of Kent and landed a job in Lisbon, Portugal, teaching English mostly to adults. That was followed by a year and a half in Japan, in Tokyo. I was managing a language school there and teaching high school students up to adults. But again, most of

⁷The difference between an international school and a national school is reasonably simple. A national school is primarily concerned with the education of the local student population and generally follows the national curriculum or that of the State/Province or Territory. Some schools that would be classified as national schools may also be classified as international schools if they offer alternative, international curricula and teach students from other countries who may be returning to their own country on completion of their schooling. International schools offer curriculum to meet the needs of many nationalities and cultures and generally cater for students other than those from the host nation.

the students were adults, very motivated students. Then I went back to Canada for five years and worked in the middle-school system, public school system. Went overseas again, four years in Manila in the Philippines, international school in Manila and that was followed by two years in Turin, Italy where I was the elementary principal.

The majority of teachers interviewed had no specific training to work in international schools. The reality is that there are very few courses globally that prepare teachers to work in international schools. There are many Masters degrees that have a bias toward international curricula topics such as globalisation, international affairs, intercultural principles and global poverty, but very few that focus on professional development of international school teachers. The exception was Kathy who was trained in Finland and after spending a year as an exchange student in Australia and living in France decided she would enrol in a new Finnish programme..

... I didn't plan to become a teacher at all, but there was this new programme in one university in Finland ... which is up north. I'm from Lapland, myself, in the Arctic Circle. So, this is close by but not exactly in my town, and this programme was teacher training. It's called the International Teacher Training, and the idea behind it is – it was the year when Finland was joining the EU and the idea was that, OK, we will be taking more foreign people, we need to know how to teach people from different backgrounds. Nowadays we call it Multicultural Teacher Training, or we talk about interculturalism. Yes, so the idea was that – there were twenty of us that were accepted into the programme and we were trained to kind of know a lot about different countries' education systems and their political systems and all sorts of things, and then a lot about culture, all sorts of things about interculturalism and intercultural sensitivity and things like that.

The majority of teachers were trained in their country of origin and had little or no preparation to work in another cultural context. Several, like John, had taken on further training after teaching in international schools for a period of time. John is a British citizen who was born in Cheshire in the north-west of England and spent his childhood in Crew. He went to university in Yorkshire in the north of England and then spent his early teaching career in East London. After five years there, he went overseas and spent six years in El Salvador and was in his sixth year teaching in Vietnam ...

Interviewer Can you tell me if you had any special training when you made a transition into teaching in international schools? Did you have any preparation for that?

John: No, there was no preparation. After going overseas, I did a Masters with Bath University on international education. But that was not until I'd been in international education for four years, before I started to do that. I think being in international education for four years made me realise it would be good to do something like that.

Others like Janet had taken part in some type of exchange programme either as a student or as a teacher. When asked if she had done any courses at university or anything like that to prepare her for teaching in an international school she replied:

Janet: Particular to international education, no. But I was given an opportunity to do part of my teaching practice in a school in the States. So I did have an opportunity. Most of my teaching practice was done in the UK, based around the University of Nottingham. But they had an exchange program so that I got to go to the States and have four weeks of teaching practice there. I felt that was important for me. Again, bearing in mind that I knew I wanted to work overseas and (had a) very good grasp of the British education system, having been through it myself and having done my qualifications over in the UK. I knew a bit about the US system but felt that I would be more marketable if I knew a bit more. So I really pushed to go on that exchange and so I did that.

When Janet was asked if it were necessary to have some form of training before teaching in an international school she commented that to work overseas you are a person of a certain sort of mentality anyway and was unsure how much you could be taught in advance. She did think that it could be valuable to have some preparation if you were going to teach in an IB school.

The teachers interviewed were asked for their thoughts on intercultural sensitivity, what it meant to them. They were then asked to talk about ways that intercultural tension could be dealt with if and when it occurred. Panos, Hanoi, had this to say.

Panos: I don't have a ready answer ... they communicate – language is not a barrier to them. So if you just watch, observe four-year-olds on the playground, I think they're the most tolerant people in the world because they don't have the preconception of what it is to be different and what it is to be a certain nationality. The other thing is that the kids who go to an international school are mostly children coming from bilingual or bicultural families already, and a lot of times they are from somewhere, they were born somewhere and lived their first few years somewhere and now they're in another country, so to them they're more like citizens of the world ...so, when I think of tolerance, it's not an issue at the age group I work at.

Heather, a teacher in Hanoi sums up the perception of teachers regarding parental involvement. When asked if she thought that there was a role for schools to help parents deal with intercultural tension she had this to say;

I would say the practical answer is: perhaps you could offer a workshop to interested parents. Perhaps you could disseminate information to parents about what you're trying to do, but if your goal is to alter parent perception, to alter parent behaviour, I'd say that's not realistic within a school day, a school year, a

school curriculum, what could you hope to accomplish? I think that the first order of the day is to help the students.

The perception of teachers to parents could best be summarised as important but not easily dealt with in the school context. The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) supplied the most important connection point for the school with parents. Milly, Hanoi had this to say; "... they have a PTA, so you have people from different countries that are working together, and that would be a venue for discussion of cross-cultural issues or cross cultural problems that might come up".

The students

Students are in a different category to teachers. Most teachers have chosen to teach in an international school. Most students have had little choice about where their parents have taken them. The majority of students taking part in focus groups for this study had been in more than one international school and several had spent little time in a national school. The three examples below are typical representatives of student's in international schools.

"I'm Belgian-American. I was born in India, down south in a hill station. I lived there for three years and then my family moved to Hong Kong, there for about five years, and then I moved to Vietnam, first in 1995-96 and I was here for about four years. Then I went to the States for two years and I went to a public school, and then I came back here in ninth grade, so this is my seventh year in Vietnam" (Charlotte).

"I'm South African American. I was born in South Africa and I lived there till I was seven. I've moved around to Laos, Nigeria, Cyprus, Azerbaijan and Washington DC so I've been to four international schools, and I've been here for about a year" (Lucy).

"... I am German as well. I was born in Germany but then moved around. The only time I lived there was between second and fourth grade. After that, I went to Zimbabwe, where I lived- went to an international school from fifth grade to eighth grade, and then I've been here (Hanoi) from ninth grade to eleventh grade now. That's two years" (Trevor).

When students were asked for their thoughts on what it meant to be inter-culturally sensitive there were a variety of responses. Charlotte equated inter-cultural sensitivity with "... just the idea of being able to be in a place where you have many different people from places and cultures that can, kind of, live together". Nancy had this to say, "... whether you will respect other people's culture, whether you're senses are ready to adapt to other cultures".

Trevor brought up a dilemma that international students faced. The students in several focus groups talked of this loss of identity and suggested that it was one reason why intercultural differences were less evident than in more conventional

national schools where there was a homogenizing tendency. Unless there was a dominant cultural group within an international school, the students were unaffected by the tendency to conform to a perceived norm.

"... one problem, probably, of being in an international school is that sometimes you lose touch of your origins. For example, for myself, I don't consider- like, when I wake up I don't think I'm German. I'm just myself, and I'm an international person.

Maybe it's a new kind of culture, but in a way it can be sad to lose your own culture, and that is a problem of being in an international school, even though you get in touch with many other cultures".

Penny spoke of her sister rather than her self in the following quote about the same question of belonging.

"I haven't experienced losing my origin so much because out of my family, my two sisters, I've been the one to live in Holland the longest. And my sister, she lives in Australia now. The thing that scares her sometimes at night is that she doesn't know where home is and she'll call us and she'll be really upset ... Sometimes I just miss having a home and a real place where I belong".

Edwards (2002, p. 50) demonstrated in her study that students found it difficult to identify their cultural identity; "A few students noted that they did not feel as though they had a particular cultural identity, rather choosing to question their identity as either being 'International' or non-existent". An earlier study by Langford (1998) argues that Third Culture Kids (TCK's) combine elements from each culture and the international lifestyle they live creating a third culture and thus "creating a commonality with others of similar experience" (Langford, 1998, p. 30). Erwin and Coleman (1998, p. 25) found that cultural identity is not an easy process for students to attain, especially those who have spent less than five years in a new country. Schaetti (1993 as cited in Langford, 1998, p. 38) felt that international schools "...have an invaluable role to play in the issue of cultural identity which overrides and encapsulates all of the mobility issues". Students taking part in the focus groups felt that learning a foreign language helped break down intercultural tension.

"I think learning the language is the best way to become familiar with culture, and therefore I think we should have a class here to learn Vietnamese, so let it be just the basics, so we can understand the people, our neighbours and so on" (Nancy).

Some students in directing behaviour to other cultural groups saw the role of the parents as significant but often students felt the need to keep their parents in line when it came to recognising differences between cultures.

"... but when you come to an international school you see all different sorts of people and you hear their point of view, and then you sort of start teaching

your parents about, you know, 'These people are actually not that bad, because they grew up in a certain environment which was totally different to yours'. ... and your parents learn from you and they're grateful for that" (Lucy).

The curriculum

The role of the curriculum was considered very important in the creation of a positive school environment. Kathy felt that the teachers were all from such different backgrounds that it was necessary to ensure that they were all working together.

"...of course everybody teaches in their own way, but curriculum can kind of ensure that we're all going pretty much in the same direction as everybody else ... its not just floating around and everybody doing their own thing and at the end noticing that we all did it the way we'd learnt it".

Many teachers considered the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme as a positive curriculum, especially for encouraging intercultural sensitivity; "... and one of the reasons why I believe in PYP is because that is the place where you can actually promote interculturalism" (Kathy,). Another teacher, Heather, put it this way; "... so yes, I think curriculum plays a part because it can give you permission to spend time on those topics, those activities, that will allow you to explore the notion of tension and compromise and resolution...". Robert felt that the curricula was key in promoting intercultural sensitivity.

"Oh I think that it is key, one of the keys. What you teach, how you teach, who teaches it are all sort of co-mingling elements in my opinion and again having sort of evolved from the State curricula of California Public Schools to embrace a different brand of education internationally, and more recently the IB. I have learned that curricula is very key to what a school says it is about.

The choice of curriculum in international schools remains a critical factor to outcomes expected from school boards and principals. As Robert noted the choice is not always straightforward. The IB has been one of the major curriculum choices for international schools for the past 36 years but alternatives based on 'hybrid' mixes such as the San Francisco adoption of the French Baccalaureate and IB are common. Similarly the American Advanced Placement International Certificates or Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) (University of Cambridge, International Examinations) offer alternative high school leaving diplomas. The neo-liberal doctrine of choice is not restricted to parents within national education systems. International parents are well aware of the benefits available to their children of international education curricula and their pressure is felt and exerted when international schools regarding curricula selection make choices.

Discussion of Results

International schools are complex organizations that are difficult to classify as the creation of categories excludes some and includes others. There is much written about the classification systems as evidenced in the introduction to this paper. The schools used in this study were all international if the definition of Gellar (1981) is applied as they welcome pupils of many nationalities and cultures. The focus of this study was on intercultural sensitivity and how international schools deal with intercultural problems should they arise. International school teachers are unique. They generally have little if any training specifically relating to international schools. Melnick and Zeichner (1995) and Bennett (1995) believe that building a cultural consciousness amongst pre-service teachers is essential to mainstreaming multicultural curricula commitment into the classroom at all levels. Bennet goes one step further in asserting that pre-service teachers' need to be versed in change from monocultural to multicultural understanding. Maintaining an appreciation for different cultural viewpoints will help pre-service teachers develop a better understanding of their students and infuse multicultural education in the curriculum. Regardless of which position is taken relating to pre-service training, it is evident from this study that teachers are the single most important factor in the creation of a harmonious school environment. The teachers interviewed felt the structure of the school was an important component in the creation of a tolerant school environment.

The curriculum, especially the IB Junior Years Programme and Middle Years Programme helped in the creation of a positive school environment. There were significant differences between the international schools in this study. The school in Hanoi, a developing nation, was critiqued by some of its staff as existing in a vacuum - it was not mixing with the indigenous Vietnamese. The other three schools were located in the developed world. Staff talked of teachers and students living in a 'bubble' and failing to integrate into the local culture.

Well, I believe ideally that education is a community process and that it isn't - as it occurs here, education is rather abstracted from ordinary life. In fact, the life of these students is rather abstracted from reality, when you think about it! You know, I mean, they come here, they get a sort of sanitised package of education, the IB programme included, and then they, you know, they go home to their compound and they go out on the weekend to their western clubs or they go and have their international community friends ... (Gerry, Hanoi)

Engle and Engle (2002) talked of students on cultural exchange programmes setting up a virtual parallel world. The creation of such a space enables the student to block out any real contact with outside cultural groups. Students living in foreign countries for any period of time, five years is suggested as a minimum to become immersed in another culture are less likely to do this than short-term cultural exchange students. The experiences cited in Grunzweig and Rinehart's (2002) *Rockin in Red Square* are generally referring to short-term visits.

Students were aware of the need to be interculturally sensitive. Differences of perception were noted in focus groups depending on how long students had

been living in the international school environment. Students talked of definite levels of engagement depending on both the personality of the student and the length of time abroad. Edwards (2002) noted that students cultural identity was in its formation stage while at school and Langford (1988) found that Third Culture Kids combined elements from each culture "creating a commonality with others of similar experience". While some students felt their parents were influential in directing their behaviour, others felt the need to keep their parents in line. Ali felt that she learnt much from the students in her school. "I really improved my sensibility as a teacher and also as an individual with my students here because you have to adapt to the students also they have to adapt to you..."

The role parents play in maintaining a harmonious school environment was unanimous across all schools. There was a perception that parents influence their students but that little could realistically be done to 'alter parent perception or behaviour'. Some students felt that they were in a better position to help their parents deal with different cultural groups as they dealt with them daily. Students also felt that the 'sort of person' you were of greater significance than your cultural background. Sports minded students tended to congregate together from what ever culture; similarly musical students or arty students were more likely to get on than any specific cultural groups.

The philosophy underpinning the school was felt strongly, especially with the United Nations school. The ethos or mission of the school was written in most classrooms and students in particular were aware of the need to 'walk the walk' rather than 'talk the talk'.

Conclusion

The difference between international schools and national schools is narrowing as people move more freely between countries. Global movements of large groups of people is more common in the 21st century than in any previous period of time. An inner city school in Sydney or New York, Sao Paulo or Quito might well reflect a similar cultural mix of students. The adoption of international curricula by a growing number of national schools as alternatives to the local qualification is also growing. There is much to be learnt from the experiences of international schools and many national schools are recognising this in their curriculum choice and their teacher recruitment policies. The need to cover a wide range of subjects and diverse points of view shadows the ever growing hidden roles that schools need to prepare students for. The world is becoming increasingly complex and students are required to take on a widening array of responsibilities and repertoires. As evidenced in this study, students often teach their parents about tolerance and understanding.

An article in *The Australian* by Roberts (2006) felt that there was an "... obsession with teaching "tolerance" and that furthermore it was preventing students from making their own moral choices. The article felt that this was in turn undermining attempts to instil "Australian values" in schools. This paper has shown how teachers, students, parents, and curriculum combine in international schools to create a tolerant and humane world society. Some of the student's

contribution to this global society is made at a personal cost to them. This closing quote from Penny speaks of this personal sacrifice. She was talking about visiting her sister in Australia and going to an old town with a friend of her sisters who said;

"Oh, this is where I played soccer when I was little! And this is where I fell and hit my head! And this ... and I just looked and I was like, "I wish I was part of that soccer team..." or something like that. Sometimes I just miss having a home and a real place where I belong.

This paper has touched on a number of issues that relate not only to international schools but to all schools. Intercultural sensitivity is needed in all classrooms. The division between international and national schools is increasingly being blurred as people move in search of work and a better way of life in increasing numbers globally. The legal and illegal movement of workers produce diverse classrooms in increasingly diverse regions of the world. The growth in numbers will increase the need to research how teacher's students and curricula can combine to create a truly global community of learners working together.

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