

# 10th AHISA Biennial Conference, Adelaide: Our Educational Future

## Educating the Global Citizen

29 September 2005

*You can't remake the world  
Without remaking yourself.  
Each new year begins within.  
It is an inward event,  
With unsuspected possibilities  
For inner liberation.*

From *Turn on your light* by Ben Okri (Phoenix House, 1999)

### **Introduction: knowing and understanding**

We spend much of our time trying to understand what other people mean, what they are really trying to tell us. Through their actions, what they say, what they write and perhaps even through their appearance: what is it they want us to understand?

Knowing is not the same as understanding when it comes to making sense of the world around us. Knowing stops at information and interest; understanding implies engagement and you will be familiar with the proverb attributed to Confucius:

*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*

There are many who are content to live their lives on the basis of knowledge alone. We can react more quickly, more decisively and often more reassuringly. By contrast, understanding can become a time-consuming business often introducing unwelcome ambiguities, even sometimes asking us to change our minds. But recognizing the difference is important because we are living in an age when to know is no longer enough. The world is shrinking and we can no longer hide, no longer walk away and no longer pretend that someone else's actions do not concern us. We must engage and we must try to understand.

Let me give you some quick examples to illustrate what I mean. During the 1990s, I visited Iraq several times to work at the International School of Baghdad. On one occasion I took with me a crate of medicines for the Saddam children's hospital. At the border (a rather scary place in the middle of the desert) I was told to report to a doctor who would have to approve the passage of the medicines. He pulled out a random sample of a dozen or so packets and found that one had passed its sell-by date. He shook it at me angrily, "This is out of date and we don't want old pills."

I knew what he meant; he had, after all, said it in perfect English. The single faulty sample had cast a doubt on the quality of the entire load. Moreover he probably took a dim view of this charity and wanted me, from rich, comfortable Switzerland to know it.

“OK,” I said, “Then I shall have to leave it here and go on without it, which is a real pity.”  
“No, no,” he replied, “You mustn’t do that - but I cannot authorize you to proceed.”

At this point, my knowledge began to turn into understanding. Here was this young, articulate doctor (probably trained in the United States) stuck in the middle of nowhere where the temperature was 50° Celsius. He knew that my pathetic offering would make no difference to the children he had seen dying each day in the hospital as a consequence of UN sanctions - perhaps his own children were amongst them. In any case, this was not the way to do business in the middle of the desert.

It was the doctor who broke the deadlock.

“Can I take some boxes of Aspirin?” he asked.  
“Of course you can,” I replied and I was immediately waved on my way to Baghdad.

The second example is nearer to my home. A member of the UK upper chamber, the House of Lords was telling me recently about his experience as a member of a parliamentary commission on global warming. As an historian, he found it remarkable that the distinguished scientists on the commission were unable to agree on the causes of global warming. We all find it convenient to blame the United States for its high profile rejection of the Kyoto Protocol (arguably more honest than your own government which signed in 1997 and now refuses to implement) but at the same time we conceal the fact that there remains significant disagreement amongst the scientific community on an issue that is of the profoundest consequences to the future of human kind. For the moment, our understanding is partial so the debate must continue.

My third example comes from the early work of Professor Howard Gardner (*The Unschooled Mind*, Basic Books, 1991) in which he studied the inability of very bright Harvard science graduates to explain convincingly apparently elementary scientific concepts. They knew, for example, that the earth’s surface temperature was greater at the equator than at the poles but were largely unable to explain why. They knew but did not really understand and this meant that their knowledge was restricted to one particular situation: it could not be more widely applied, for example to other planets or different seasons of the year. Their exclusive scientific education had produced knowledge instead of understanding.

I have deliberately chosen these three examples to illustrate how understanding is culturally determined, how it often introduces uncertainty, and how it is often poorly taught at schools and universities.

### **International education and the global citizen**

Going beyond knowing to understanding is a key feature of an international education. You might argue that it is a key feature of any education but my point is that very few issues of significance today can be understood within one’s own national context. The situation in Iraq and the phenomenon of global warming affect us all, each provoking different interpretations, different points of view, different solutions. The capacity to get under the surface in order to understand these differences, to balance one against another and to try to resolve them is the hallmark of the global citizen.

I was reminded of this by a pamphlet I received from Washington International School which explains to parents the school's mission to educate students to be effective and responsible global citizens.

*A global citizen is one who seeks out a range of views and perspectives when solving problems. He or she does not "tolerate" or "accept" cultural differences or viewpoints, since these words often implicitly place the speaker at the centre of what is acceptable and right. Global citizens proactively seek out those who have backgrounds that are different from their own, examine ideas that challenge their own, and then enjoy the complexity. We must go beyond tolerance and acceptance.*

Two parts of that statement struck me. The first was the reminder that we do indeed put ourselves at the centre of what is acceptable and right. My knowledge, my experience, my culture, these all create lenses through which I focus my understanding of other people and other ideas.

The second point is the reference to *going beyond tolerance* and I was reminded of the comment of the writer EM Forster (in an essay entitled 'Tolerance' from *Two Cheers for Democracy* Arnold, 1951)

*Tolerance is a very dull virtue. It is boring. Unlike love, it has always had a bad press. It is negative. It merely means putting up with people, being able to stand things.*

I shall return to this but in the next few minutes I want to explore areas of the curriculum that I believe will encourage the development of global citizens: young people who are able to

- take themselves away from the centre of what is right and acceptable
- examine the ideas of others that challenge their own beliefs
- go beyond mere tolerance and acceptance
- enjoy the complexity of ambiguity
- nonetheless reach rational conclusions
- in short, have begun to make the transition from knowing to understanding.

I do not start with a blank sheet of paper and I shall not be able to resist the occasional reference to the IB. But let me first put on the table Martha Nussbaum's classic work *Cultivating Humanity* (Harvard UP, 1997) in which she proposes three capacities for developing the humanity which she regards as the essential component of the global citizen in today's world

- a critical examination of oneself and one's traditions
- the ability to see oneself as bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern
- concern and ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a different person.

So let us examine each of these capacities in more depth in the context of a secondary school curriculum and see if we can relate this triangle of academic rigour, human compassion and cultural diversity to the everyday reality of the classroom.

## **A critical examination of oneself and one's traditions**

Very few books in recent years have provoked the interest and the controversy of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003). I guess the reaction of most people as they reach the end is similar to mine: "What a great read" followed by "I wonder if any of it is true?" a question that has spawned a shelf-full of critical analyses. Is it historically accurate, artistically sound, geographically feasible? Does its account of religious schisms contain any religious truth? Is the reader being taken for a ride? Is it fiction or faction?

Don't worry, I am not going to add to the debate, but knowing what is true, and understanding the criteria for judging truth – mathematical, scientific, artistic, religious, moral – lie at the heart of any critical examination. Students must develop reliable benchmarks in their lives against which they can measure themselves and their traditions.

I want to make five very brief curriculum suggestions in order to develop this point.

*First*, I believe that students should study a broad curriculum while they are at school. It is desirable they engage with the different intellectual methods which humans have devised to make sense of themselves and their surroundings and the excuse "I find this difficult" is no reason for opting out of it; indeed it could be a good reason for doing more of it, but perhaps differently. In this respect I think the IB offers a good model because it has devised realistic alternatives within learning areas like mathematics and foreign languages which are often deemed to be 'too difficult' for universal study (that is by anyone who lives outside continental Europe where they are deemed to be essential).

*Second*, I believe it is especially important that students maintain and develop their studies of the empirical sciences. The social pendulum has swung widely from its position when I was at school when scientists were the enviable elite of society: they alone had an explanation of the past and they alone possessed the key to the future. Today, the picture is much more confused and issues like environmental pollution, the nuclear debate, cloning, pharmaceuticals and GM crops provoke angry argument. It is right that they should but let us also remember that science offers a powerful protection against fundamentalism and extremism. It is concerned with observable reality and, refreshingly, makes no claims for eternal truths.

My *third* suggestion is to commend to you the concept of the IB course known as Theory of Knowledge (TOK) which explores questions about different sources and different kinds of knowledge. The following are typical questions for discussion in a TOK lesson:

- Does knowledge come from inside or outside? Do we construct reality or do we recognize it?
- How do computer languages compare with the conventional written and spoken languages of everyday discourse?
- Does the nature of reason vary across cultures?
- Is scientific method a product unique to western culture, or is it universal?
- If truth is difficult to prove in history, does it follow that all versions are equally acceptable?

Students are challenged and often puzzled by TOK, but then they come back five years later to say it was the most important thing they ever did at school.

If TOK is a plus for the IB then my *fourth* observation is a minus. We do not take the study of world religions anything like seriously enough. Indeed, with the exception of a brief appearance in TOK the concepts of religion and spirituality need not appear at all in the IB student's education. I suggest to you that it is very difficult to make sense of many events in today's world without understanding the influence of religious belief on many cultures and, conversely, the influence of cultures upon religious belief. The notion, for example, that there is one Islam, shared in common by all Islamic cultures, is clearly unacceptable.

*Fifth*, of all the descriptions applied to the IB the one I like best is "the programme that has the courage to leave the gaps". Students cannot be expected to cover everything and providing the opportunity both for reflection and for digging really deeply into certain parts of their course is surely the sign of a good curriculum. These are both vital aspects of any 'critical examination' as well as being an excellent preparation for university study.

### **The human condition**

Of all the heart-rending images of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, few can match the photographs and films of Jewish families being rounded up like cattle, transported in wagons to concentration camps like cattle and then finally slaughtered like cattle. I think it is the abuse of individual human dignity that is so offensive. That dignity is formally enshrined in our human rights but it is built up from many precious patchwork components: our family and friends, our brief history that is linked to the past and future stories of so many other people, our memories and the memories that others have of us, our ambitions and aspirations. To see all this abused by uniformed thugs in railway sidings and finally destroyed in gas chambers is to see the rejection of any sense of a shared humanity, but what is different about the deaths of 80,000 Japanese civilians killed when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima 60 years ago. The moral dilemma that this (and other similar actions) poses is obvious. I am not a pacifist and I believe that, in certain extreme situations, war is morally justified, even though the consequence will often be the massive suffering of the innocent. (This does not, of course, imply that all means of pursuing such a war will be justified.) However, the extreme situations that make a war morally defensible must be most carefully defined and scrupulously monitored.

I am labouring this point because I want to counter the argument that war legitimizes any form of violence; that the suicide bomber's calculated slaughter of innocent civilians and of himself is a morally legitimate response to an aerial missile attack which kills innocent civilians. One reason why the war in Iraq has been such a disaster, in my view, is because, launched without United Nations support, it had very dubious legitimacy and that has blurred what was already a very thin, but important, moral line between justifiable and unjustifiable violence against other nation. The deliberate undermining of the Geneva Convention, which is an integral part of a 'defensible war', has further confused the issue.

The preamble to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights starts with the words

*Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, ...*

What elements of the curriculum will encourage a sense of belonging to a human family of inherent dignity? What elements of a curriculum might persuade the suicide bomber on the

London Underground or the soldier at Srebrenica to change his mind? I am going to make four quick suggestions concerning the curriculum: a woefully inadequate response to such a major challenge but if they encourage you to add more of your own then we shall be getting somewhere.

The *first* will perhaps surprise you, but I believe the recognition of our human artistic potential is a good starting point. One of the best things my parents ever did was to take me to Lascaux in South West France where I saw the fabulous wall paintings several years before the cave was closed for ever. They are breathtaking in their size, colour and vitality but they also provide a profoundly moving human link, a visual response to a human need that leaps across a gap of 17,000 years. The need to draw, to dance and to make music binds us all together and has the power to enhance our dignity.

In May of this year, European education ministers gathered to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the relief of the Auschwitz concentration camp and they issued a message to the world containing the following recommendation, to

*Stress the indispensable and essential value of history teaching for fulfilling the fundamental ambition to educate citizens for the prevention of evil;*

and this *second* point reminds me that it was the challenge of history that launched the IB. In 1963 five students at the International School of Geneva took the new Contemporary History examination that offered a more reflective, analytical approach to world history and was the precursor of the IB Diploma Programme five years later. Indeed, the immediate acceptance of one of these candidates by Harvard University provided an important piece of publicity for this new approach to learning.

My *third* point is a very different one because I want to draw attention to the importance of economic understanding. At the most basic level, human dignity is linked to fresh water, food, warmth and shelter. Only when these are satisfied and adequate medical care is available, can human beings begin to achieve their true potential as human beings, their true humanity. Huge controversy surrounds current global economics and the institutions that are supposed to exist for the greater good of humanity like the WTO, IMF and the World Bank. Are they good, are they wicked, or are they somewhere in between?

Thomas Friedman's challenging account of globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *The World is Flat* (Allen Lane, 2005) helps us to understand how quickly the economic scene is changing, threatening to turn today's winners, and in particular the United States, into tomorrow's losers, and Friedman encourages us to reflect on the key role that is played by education.

*The jobs are going to go where the best educated workforce is with the most competitive infrastructure and environment for creativity and supportive government.*

Today's global citizen therefore needs to understand the main themes that emerge from a modern study of economics.

My *fourth* point recommends another IB practice, that of community service. The compulsory 'creativity, action, service' programme (known as CAS) is about learning from working alongside others who are not your peers. It does not pretend to be a substitute for social service, though on occasions it may become that, but rather it aims to challenge the

student to think about the lessons learned from an experience that brings them into contact with other human beings in a way that may be radically different from day-to-day life at school. It is an essential component of the course and without its satisfactory completion, the student will not gain the IB diploma.

The IB Research Unit is currently completing a study of intergenerational learning in the context of CAS in the United Kingdom. Many CAS activities involve students collaborating across a generational gap; understanding the special nature of this learning becomes of increasing importance as more parents go out to work or, tragically, more succumb to AIDS.

### **Wearing the shoes of a different person**

Much has been written about the capacity to identify with someone else's culture and I have myself cautioned against some of the over-ambitious claims that have been made, especially by international schools (International Schools Journal, April 2000). Nonetheless, I think we can all readily agree that the capacity to empathize, or at the very least to see the other person's point of view, is essential for the global citizen. If culture really is the 'software of the mind', as Geert Hofstede has famously suggested in his classic text *Cultures and Organizations* (McGraw-Hill, 1991), then it is going to require a special effort to re-route the cultural wiring that we seem to have acquired by the end of primary schooling; it will not happen by chance.

I cannot resist a minor diversion at this point in order to illustrate how that wiring is sometimes laid down. A friend has recently sent me an hilarious book entitled *The Clumsiest People in Europe* (Bloomsbury, 2005) which is an edited reprint of three short books written around 1850 by a famous English children's writer, Mrs Favell Lee Mortimer. Mrs Mortimer only left England twice during her lifetime, once for Paris and Brussels and once for Edinburgh, but that did not stop her expressing her extensive views on the cultural characteristics of diverse nations around the world. You can anticipate her comments about Australia's indigenous people

*The savages of Australia have neither god, nor king*

but those closer to her home, with white skins and a decent job to go to, do not seem to have impressed her any better. For example

*Nothing useful is well done in Sweden.*

It is tempting to laugh at Mrs Mortimer's poisonous comments (prefaced by the reminder: *Which country do you love best? Your own country.*) until we remember that, as a best-selling children's author, she had a huge influence on the cultural attitudes of young people in Victorian England. Nor should we suppose that the cultural stereotypes that she helped to create have entirely disappeared 150 years later.

What contribution can the curriculum make to a young person's sensitivity to cultural difference? I have time for only two suggestions and each of them deserves a lecture of its own.

Let me start with the great American psychologist, Jerome Bruner, who has suggested (*The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996) that all cultures organise their knowledge of the world into two broad and distinctive ways: as logical scientific and as narrative thinking. I spoke earlier of the importance of science, not just for its economic benefits, but also as a bastion against extremism. Let me now look in more detail at the narrative expression of culture.

The IB puts great emphasis on the study of literature, both in the mother tongue and in translation from other languages. Literature is a powerful medium for exploring the influence of culture and I defy anyone, for example, to be unmoved by J.M.Coetzee's, early novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Secker and Warburg, 1980) and its stark description of total cultural separation in the defence of a doomed empire. It was, of course, a parable for the apartheid regime in South Africa.

A friend told me recently that she was unable to finish Chimamanda Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (Harper Perennial, 2004)), because she found it too upsetting. Certainly the portrayal of the domineering Nigerian father as democrat, fanatical catholic convert and child abuser is profoundly disturbing. But the book is really about the impact of confused cultural messages on the impressionable teenager, Kambili: a destabilising mixture of British imperial legacy, the catholic church and Nigerian tribal tradition.

Let me recommend two other books that have similarly impressed me by their handling of cultural difference. The first is the remarkable novel by the Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red* (Faber & Faber, 2001) which is set in late 16<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul. It really does force you to try on different shoes because the same events are observed, chapter by chapter, by different people – even a dog and a horse make their own contributions – and the reader is conscious of being immersed in a quite different cultural context. Finally, my favourite book of the last decade is *Le Testament Français* by the Russian novelist, Andrei Makine, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1997) which explores the cultural ambiguity experienced by a boy growing up with his French grandmother in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. It is a wonderful book with a very sharp sting in its tail.

I have no idea if the books I have just mentioned are included in the IB world literature list and it does not matter because there are ten more like them for every one I have mentioned. My point is that, in the hands of a good teacher, literature is a very powerful medium for exploring the importance of culture and for understanding the consequences of cultural difference.

Language is an integral part of culture but I am afraid I do not accept the argument that the study at school of a foreign language will throw open the door to new cultures – though later on it might. Let us be less ambitious, more realistic and accept that a new language will extend the student's range of communication and crucially will demonstrate a willingness to pay homage to another culture, to move oneself from the centre of what is right and to put oneself at a profound disadvantage. I know from the day-to-day experience of living in a French-speaking community just how much of yourself is surrendered when you are required to communicate in another language. Quite simply, you have abandoned part of yourself and assumed a different and more defensive identity.

I have reached my final point which is perhaps the toughest of all. Shortly after the London bombings of 7 July, I read an over-hasty article in the UK Sunday Times by Michael Portillo,

a former Conservative minister and a member of the intellectual Right, entitled *Multiculturalism has failed but tolerance can save us* (July 17 2005). The article rejected multiculturalism as the appropriate model for accommodating ethnic minorities in Britain (particularly in its newly terrorised situation) but based this conclusion on a fundamentally wrong definition of multiculturalism – in my view – namely that all cultures are equal in value.

I see no reason to suppose that all cultures are equal in value, either in an intrinsic or a pragmatic sense. The pragmatic point is obvious enough: cultures must change with their environment and the capacity of some to survive, except as protected species, in an increasingly globalized society must be in doubt in the long term. However, it is more controversial to suggest that some cultures are intrinsically less valuable than others but if they encourage oppression, mysticism and ignorance; if they prevent human beings, particularly women, from achieving their full potential, then I believe that is a justifiable conclusion. The global citizen has to make choices and to account for them. I well remember an alumnus of the International School of Geneva telling me that the school had left him with an overwhelming burden of tolerance; it had never helped him to decide where to draw the line and how to say about any practice ‘I find that unacceptable’.

Can we therefore look at the term ‘multicultural’ from a different angle, applying it to individual members of a society, rather than to the society as a whole? Can we ask how global citizens might become multicultural; how might they respond to another culture so as not only enrich their own lives, but to indicate their respect and openness towards others, in a minority, in their society? It could be in trivial ways by eating different food or in profound ways through the choice of a partner. It might be by embracing another culture’s music, its films and its literature. It could be by learning another culture’s language or by taking a job that involves daily contact with a very different group of people.

This is what the Lebanese/French writer, Amin Maalouf, calls the ‘thread of affiliation’ in his short but powerful book *In the name of identity: violence and the need to belong* (Arcade Publishing, 2000)

*A “thread of affiliation” links me to the crowd: the thread may be thick or thin, strong or weak, but it is easily recognisable by all those who are sensitive on the subject of identity.*

I believe that global citizens want to try to create these cultural threads of affiliation between themselves and those around them.

I have exhausted my time and probably exhausted your patience. I have been trying to emphasize the combination of three qualities in the global citizen: intellectual rigour, human compassion and cultural sensitivity. Let me therefore end with a brief statement, the IBO mission statement, which I believe encapsulates all three:

*The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.*

*To this end the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.*

*These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.*

George Walker  
director general  
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