

Universal Education and the World Citizen

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Education is defined as “the action or process of providing for mental and moral development and cultivation” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*; 1974). ‘Abdu’l-Baha writes that “universal education” causes man to “rise from the lowest levels of savagery to the highest pinnacles of spiritual development” (*Baha’i World Faith*. Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1956, p. 249).

Universal education, the cause of which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens” (The Universal House of Justice. *Peace: More than an End to War*, Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1986, p. 147).

To assure universal education it is “a vital necessity to establish schools...even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write” (Abdu’l Baha, *ibid.* p. 142).

Universal education should be understood to mean that all people should be educated. ‘Abdu’l-Baha continues to set the standard for universal education by saying “a universal curriculum should be established and the basis of ethics be the same” (*ibid.* p. 241).

The establishment of a universal curriculum is not the subject of this paper, but rather one small aspect of what it may include. Ethics, morals and rules of conduct are basic elements seen in the definitions of education. The Universal House of Justice writes:

“Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies” (The Universal House of Justice, *ibid.* p. 15).

The spiritual principle of the oneness of mankind is one goal of universal education, as “Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole.” Baha’u’llah’s statement is: ‘The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.’

“The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world’s peoples does not exclude love of one’s country. The advantage of part of a world society, such as an individual country, is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased” (UHI *ibid.* p. 13).

Universal education and a universal curriculum should include the teaching of world citizenship. The steps towards educating for world citizenry have a foundation in the academic field which has become known by several names, among them, international education and global education.

The concept of international education is millennial, though sometimes considered the educational innovation of recent decades. Brought forth in this century as a proposal for an International University (Zweig, 1967; p. 8), it was first documented as a Biblical reference beginning when King Solomon requested international technical aid during the Tenth Century B.C. in the form of skills and materials. Emperor Asoka of India promoted Buddhism internationally, realizing "the most comprehensive scheme of religious missionary enterprise recorded in the history of the world" (Fraser, 1964; p. 18 and 19). The government of Persia, during the reign of King Noshirwan the Just (531-579), founded the University of Jundishapur, known as "the greatest intellectual center of the time: there Greek, Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Persian ideas could be compared, exchanged and eventually syncretized" (ibid. p. 19).

Historical examples of international education are found in the T'ang Dynasty (620 - 907) of China, the Japanese Empire under Kiyogimi Sugawara (770 - 842), Alexander the Great, the early Roman Emperors, during the Middle Ages and under the more recent sovereigns of Western Europe.

Proposals in international education have had two aims: political and educational. Advocates of the educational aspect see the role of international education as "...the building of a politically, culturally and physically compatible, if not homogeneous, world society" (Zweig, p. 4). This could be considered as a form of education which transcends national boundaries, cultures and customs.

International education has also been approached from academic or practical aspects. Academically, programs in international relations, foreign languages, bilingual education, and foreign trade, to name a few, are seen on numerous campuses. International exchange programs and foreign students are on the increase everywhere.

Traditional programs coupled with student and faculty exchanges, usually at the university level, however, are not a substitute for the international nature of education hoped to be attained by international education. Traditional education leads to traditional values and the xenophobia and nationalism which international education hopes to transcend. International education seeks to create a global ethical value system, from which the world benefits. This is the forerunner of a universal curriculum.

Up to the present, international education concepts have been taught mostly at the university level, when basic societal values, attitudes and responsibilities have already been shaped. Few schools have tried to shape global, or international, values, attitudes and responsibilities from the time students enter school. The United Nations International School is an example of an elementary and secondary school with the philosophy "to preserve the cultural values of each nationality while practicing the ideals of international understanding and cooperation" (Zweig, p. 144). This philosophy and the resulting curriculum is contingent partly upon the nature of the students; they are the children of United Nations delegates.

International schools, worldwide, seem to have stalled in the same pattern. The student population comes from different countries, thus the 'international nature' of the school. The practical element of the overall curriculum is left to the country in which the school is built, or is adopted from the country from which a majority of students are citizens. This should not be mistaken for international education.

The term International Education has been used to describe a variety of activities and programs which encourage the flow of ideas and people across cultural and geographic boundaries (*Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 1985, p. 945). International Education is not a clearly defined professional or disciplinary term, but, rather, a useful label for a wide variety of intersecting activities and research interests. Activities have included

exchanges, technical cooperation, language and area studies, and information exchange activities. Implicit or explicit in the reasons for these activities is the concept that these programs are vital if we are to prepare a citizenry capable of dealing with the challenges of the modern world; we need to speak to the silent similarities in all of us.

The major development of technical assistance activities following World War II triggered interest in the United States in all aspects of international education. Concurrently, U.S. educational institutions were involved in overseas educational development activities, helping countries to develop educational systems. This activity led to growth in the field of comparative education; the study of the dynamics of education in individual countries around the world.

Foreign language, area studies (the study of foreign people and culture from the perspective of different disciplines), international relations and multicultural education have all evolved from these activities.

One of the best known activities within the field of international education is international educational and cultural exchange which has continued to accelerate since World War II. The network of institutions and organizations undertaking such activities is vast; including universities, government agencies, professional exchange organizations and private voluntary groups.

Senator William Fulbright, the originator of the Fulbright Program noted in a speech to the Council on International Educational Exchange that, "Perhaps the greatest power of educational exchange is the power to convert nations into peoples and to translate ideologies into human aspirations" (Rhinesmith 1985, p. 12).

Stephen Rhinesmith (Rhinesmith, 13 and 14), past president of the American Field Service, says that international exchange serves four purposes:

1. International understanding for the maintenance of international peace.
2. Acquisition of knowledge and skills usually associated with formal educational experiences in which students have traveled abroad.
3. Transfer of technology and professional expertise dedicated to improving the welfare of people worldwide.
4. Personal development to increase a sense of self and self-confidence, to increase the level of tolerance for the diversity of lifestyles, and for professional interests.

Various countries highlight one or another of the goals of international exchange. Japan highlights the promotion of mutual understanding, and Germany relates exchange to general education and the diffusion of knowledge across national boundaries. The Yugoslavs considered exchange an integrative, political force in the world. The British, on the other hand, see the goal of exchange to be a diversification of the scientific community (Klineberg 1976, pp. 20 and 21).

In the eighties a new synthetic area emerged called global education. This term endeavors to cut across traditional disciplinary and professional interests imbedded in earlier definitions, and, viewing the world as a single system, suggests educational approaches that prepare citizens to cope with an increasingly complex domestic and international community. This term approaches the concept of a universal curriculum. Anderson (cited in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, p. 93) defines global education as "efforts to bring about changes in the content, in the methods, and in the social context of education in order to better prepare students for citizenship in a global age". Implicit in this definition is the concept "that citizens in a global age must develop competencies that have not been traditionally emphasized by

schools, and that certain changes must take place in the educational process if schools are to become more effective agents of citizen education in a global age" (ibid.).

References

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