

## THE INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM AND HOW IT DEVELOPS STUDENTS AND STAFF

My discussion covers ways of making any curriculum international, even when the school and the education authority have to comply with a prescriptive national curriculum, as is the case in both England and China.

The material will also comment, as it goes along, on the ways such an international dimension can develop the potential, and performance, of both staff and students.

I shall make the points that I think are important by reference to case studies and particular individual examples. The accompanying PowerPoint presentation will contain only images, with no text at all.

The first example is of a student who was 17 in 1999. He was in the last 2 years of the school of which I was the principal, and he was studying Russian, Mathematics and IT at Advanced Level. He was not a particularly academic student. His family was not rich, and nobody in his family had ever gone to university. He had to work at nights and weekends in a bakery to make a contribution to the family budget. He had other brothers and sisters who were younger.

His IT skills were spectacularly good; he was offered jobs before he left school. His Russian language was not very good. He went on a trip to Russia organised by the school. He was very excited and inspired by the experience.

On the return to school, I arranged for him to go back to Russia by himself, and spend 3 weeks work experience in a school in St Petersburg. His job was to set up the schools website, and link it to our own school website. This meant that he was working in an area in which he was very strong; IT is like an international language. Back in the late 90s, schools had much less developed understanding on IT, and he was really useful to the school. The visit gave him great confidence in himself, and the experience on his CV certainly helped him get a place at the local university. He did well at university, and returned to Djanogly City Academy as a teacher of mathematics. He gained early promotion, and was exceptionally good at working with the youngsters there.

He has just gained a job teaching in Dubai. There is no doubt in my mind that the international experience at an early age made sense of the Russian language course he was doing, and made him apply his IT skills in a practical way.

Another way of making the curriculum international is to involve visitors in the curriculum, and to employ teachers from other countries.

An example of the first way of making the curriculum truly international was the exchanges we made with Mozambique. Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world, and has been the location for internal power struggles for many years. As well as the indigenous African languages, they speak Portuguese, and at the time of the work we did there, were introducing English into schools as a matter of urgency.

The first stage of the exchange was when I visited myself, working with the British Council. Covering 2000 Kilometres in a Land Rover with a local driver, a local teacher of English and a representative of a NGO, in less than a week, I visited schools in Xai Xai and Inhumbane. It was a year after the devastating floods which had killed many people, left thousands of people homeless, and had wrecked the roads and communications networks. Even in the capital Maputu, a huge ravine caused by flood water had driven a great gap through one of the main roads.

It was a profoundly affecting experience to see children, who had walked miles to school, in immaculate uniform, sitting on a piece of cloth on a mud floor and working hard at their lessons.

I decided that my teachers and students had to be exposed to this experience somehow.

I sent 2 young teachers to do the same trip that I had done, to take pictures and arrange to send some useful things to the schools. The impact on them was very great. It certainly gave them confidence, and they both went on to promoted posts. It also gave them a different perspective on life in school.

One of them said on her return:

“I will never complain about anything ever again!”

Of course, this does not last for ever, but it forces people to question their own values and behaviour, and sometimes produces a startling change in attitude. Then I had to get the Mozambiquan teacher of English, Ignacio Mate, back to visit our school. This was very difficult to fund, but it was achieved, and he visited the school for 3 weeks just before Christmas. He made a deep impact on the students. Part of the humanities curriculum is to teach about the differences between rich and poor across the world. He would take part in such a lesson and answer questions about what it was really like when the floods hit Mozambique. He lived in Xai Xai, which was the centre for the relief operations. Some of you will remember the news story of the woman who gave birth to her daughter in a tree.

Ignacio told the students that 26 family members turned up at his house ( a very small house) because their homes had been swept away. They just had the clothes they wore. He had a wife and 4 children, but he took them all in, and he had to provide for all of them for 3 months. He said that luckily he had some savings, as he was the only one with a job. He obviously never thought for a moment that he would turn any of them away. This story made both the students and the staff think very hard about their own lives, and all the things they took for granted every day.

He went shopping for his family in charity shops, because the prices in the retail shops were far too much to even contemplate, but he was very pleased with the whole experience.

This whole experience made a part of the curriculum much more vital and meaningful.

Now I come to the most fundamental way any school can change the curriculum, but still remain true to what it is obliged to teach.

I introduced Chinese to Djanogly in 1996. But it was not enough to merely introduce a language, however significant that might be. I was as much concerned to introduce knowledge about China, and what life was like in China. As well as students learning Chinese, Chinese members of staff were

employed. There have been Chinese teachers at the school teaching IT and business as well as Chinese language. There have been Chinese researchers working in the school, and a Chinese national running the business centre. This does much more than introduce another language. What happened next was that Chinese students found out about the school and its connections with China (at the time the Chinese national flag flew outside alongside the Union flag, following a visit from the Chinese Ambassador in London) and joined some of the older students in lessons.

The school was involved in developing the summer school which the British Council ran very successfully every summer. We pioneered the idea at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. For 3 weeks in the summer holidays a group of students, with accompanying teachers, were immersed in Chinese lessons, lessons about Chinese culture and society, and mixed with local students. It was a very exciting time.

There is no doubt that it changed the students' view of the world, and of China in particular. We also took students from other schools, and I remember one very brilliant boy in particular. He had already secured a place at University. However, after the summer school in China he changed his course from Geography to Chinese. The experience had opened his eyes to possibilities for his life that he had never imagined.

Another student from a different school became very upset at the contrasts he witnessed in Beijing. At the time, it was very easy to walk from an international standard hotel to a hutong, which was as it had been for many years. He experienced feelings that he had not encountered before. Many students were similarly affected. To help these students cope with and develop these new thoughts, we arranged a student conference in globalisation, with some significant speakers about the world economy and how both rich and poor might be affected. Developing thinking and awareness in students always makes their capacity for achievement better than it was.

Students at Djanogly still learn Chinese, and still have staff teaching them from many different countries. For a year, a very talented Chinese teacher of mathematics taught maths at the school, with great success.

I believe that educators have a responsibility to involve both the students and the staff in meaningful international projects, which enhance understanding and deepen knowledge. In particular, I believe that all schools in the West should be making links with China, and increasing understanding and the possibilities of working together for the future.

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