

The globally confident school

Roy Blatchford

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One of the paradoxes at the heart of many international schools is that they are simultaneously inward and outward facing. A typical international school - say in Switzerland, Qatar or Bangkok - has students from all parts of the globe who (in normal times) commute in and out of the schools every term.

At the same time, once on campus and taught often by ex-pats living in their community bubbles, the students form a tightly knit body which focuses quite properly on their own mutual well-being.

Leaders in these high performing international schools recognise the importance of their students looking outwards. And given their multi-cultural make-up, this is not difficult. Their families live in different time-zones; their social media connections, work experience placements and school journeys are richly global.

At a point in time when the UK is looking afresh at its own identity and seeking to forge beyond-Europe links, it is timely to ask what part our schools and colleges are playing in this global re-orientation. Are we preparing children and young people in primary, special, secondary and further education settings to think of themselves as global citizens? Not as much as we should be.

Any globally confident school asks students to reflect on the following five key questions:

1. Do you know and constantly learn about what is happening in the world, both globally and in other countries or cultures?
2. Do you value other people's cultures and differences, as well as seeing their similarities to your own - and, in order to do this, build a sense of identity of self: Who am I? Where have I come from? How do I see the world, and why?
3. Are you able to converse in other languages – not every language of course, but having enough of an understanding of language to appreciate that the world looks different through different linguistic constructs?

4. Are you digitally confident, in order to be able to communicate effectively across the world – and having the skills to collaborate, negotiate, discuss, and weigh up action critically?
5. Do you have the confidence to take action – from simply reaching out to others, to being able to travel, to take personal and collective responsibility for sustainability in the world?

That's not a simple set of questions. But it is one which, adopted by schools and colleges across the UK, might help children and young people look outwards rather than inwards. Answering those questions within the curriculum would help students embed an appreciation of different cultures, religions and attitudes which often collide and confuse.

The state of modern foreign language teaching in the UK is woeful. Successive government legislation over forty years has not been constructive, and the fact that an estimated two billion of the world's population speak English as an additional language offers little incentive to the Brits to master a 'foreign tongue'.

That inability to see oneself through another culture and language is fundamentally limiting.

Ofsted will return to schools in September with a sharpened eye on the curriculum – what else have HMI been doing for a year but preparing for this moment, interrogating subject areas in the way our June guest columnist reflects on [‘Great news! Primary languages are rubbish!’](#).

Sadly, the current inspection framework fails to promote the global perspectives which come readily to international schools. These are important perspectives and all about forging a mindset for life. Some primary and secondary schools I know in England are doing this with energy and relish – see [Alumnis Multi-Academy Trust](#) and [Slough & Eton CofE Business and Enterprise College](#).

As the system refreshes its ways of doing, shaping an outward-facing curriculum integral to a globally confident school/college might be a worthwhile ambition for every leader in every community across the nation. A year of lockdown has made us myopic. Somehow we all need to imagine different paths and futures.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is [‘The Three Minute Leader’](#).