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‘International-mindedness’: a field of struggle, confusion and hope

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INTERNATIONAL-MINDEDNESS A FIELD OF STRUGGLE, CONFUSION AND HOPE

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to illustrate that in the literature on international-mindedness, no single narrative account that clearly defines international-mindedness or explains developmental ways of developing it, exists. Complex and newly emerging literature discussing its notion or ways of developing it present innovative ideas, yet many clashing themes. Given that many international schools are currently exploring the term international-mindedness, it is time that tensions in the literature as well as gaps in current research on international-mindedness are examined. It is anticipated that by examining the literature and research to date and connecting shared themes, silenced areas and points of contention on international-mindedness, more research enthusiasts may be able to consider this topic as a needy topic worthy of further investigation.

II. INTERNATIONAL-MINDEDNESS AND CURRENT LITERATURE

Literature devoted to the development of international-mindedness is exceptionally scarce. As Haywood (2007) argues: 'The literature is scanty as regards research to identify hard learning outcomes' (p. 80). The most recent additions to literature devoted to the topic of international-mindedness are from Skelton (2007), Cambridge and Thompson (2008), Theresa

(2008), Cause (2008, 2009, 2011), Ellwood (2010) and Haywood (2007). Other literature from Marshall (2007), Sampatkumar (2007), Hill (2000, 2003, 2007), Snowball (2007, 2009), and McKenzie (2004) make close reference to the term international-mindedness either through discussion on its relationship to international education or in relation to ambiguities over different terms associated with international education. Overall, this newly emerging literature on international-mindedness presents many innovative ideas, yet many opposing themes. The risk is that the deficiency of literature, along with the clashing themes may lead educators to the idea that the term international-mindedness is too vague and cannot be achieved.

At the time of writing, the most recent addition to literature that combines dialogue on international education was the book titled *The SAGE Handbook of International Education*, edited by Mary Hayden, Jack Levy and Jeff Thompson (2007). This book mainly presents current discussions, results from research and debates that exist on issues related to the topic of international education. Contributing authors maintain a close association with international education and international-mindedness, referring to the term from time to time throughout their discussions on issues related to international education. Four contributing chapters specifically provide emerging ideas on the definition of international-mindedness and address problems with the development of international-mindedness (Gunesch 2007 ; Haywood 2007 ; Marshall 2007 ; Skelton 2007). Haywood (2007) recognises the struggles over defining the term international-mindedness and urges for a clearer consensus:

Regarding international-mindedness, there seems to be a prevailing perception that "we know what we mean" even if the definition is still under construction...we cannot simply assume that "we know what we mean"...It is time that we face these issues and move towards identification of what our educational objectives should really be since the absence of a more articulate position is not helpful to schools or to students. (p. 80).

Haywood argues that by getting closer to understanding what international-mindedness is, the objectives of international education could become clearer. This follows on from an earlier proposal presented by Hill (2000), who recommends that the term education for international-mindedness could replace the term international education. Haywood explains that

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Hill's suggestion could move educators closer to focusing on the outcomes of education rather than the processes. They both agree that this change may make it easier for schools to adapt key international educational experiences for their particular school context. However, Haywood's main reservation with this suggestion is that the existing confusion over the term international-mindedness could cause more confusion for educators, as 'Hill's invitation to explore the meaning of this term has still not led to any agreed understanding on what is really involved' (p. 80).

Ian Hill, (2000) Deputy Director of the IBO in Geneva believes that an internationally-minded person is someone who understands that people of different backgrounds hold different views, examines why they hold them and respects other points of view without necessarily accepting them. He claims that international-mindedness is fundamental to the mission statement of the IBO. The IB learner profile exists in order to offer a broad common ground from which any teacher or student in any IB school worldwide can understand international-mindedness (2007). It lists the outcomes that the IBO claim an internationally-minded person should demonstrate. These outcomes are expressed as ten attributes: reflective, principled, inquirer, knowledgeable, thinker, communicator, principled, open-minded, risk-taker, balanced, caring and reflective (IBO 2007). The attributes of the IB learner profile are expected to be reflected in the 'school's organization, philosophy, the formal and informal curriculum and in all interactions with the wider school community in order to provide a learning environment in which international-mindedness can be nurtured' (Hill 2007, p. 35).

Hill asserts that the IBO hopes that each student will graduate from an IB school as a student who demonstrates the attributes of the IB learner profile – someone who 'in the struggle to establish a personal set of values, will be laying the foundation upon which international-mindedness will develop and flourish' (IBO, 2007, p. 4). However, although the IB learner profile explicitly defines the attributes that the IBO believes an internationally-minded person would embrace, many educators in the literature argue that the model has its shortcomings. For example, Haywood (2007) argues that although the IB learner profile explicitly states the outcomes any child from any culture needs to express, it lacks guidance on specific learning experiences to form the basis of international-mindedness:

The IBO has gone some way towards defining international-mindedness through the ten attributes of the learner profile and international educators have become familiar with their generic aspirations. Even so, there is scant guidance on assessment and reporting and little formal basis for understanding precisely what outcomes each attribute will lead to or how the profile might be reflected in students at different stages of development through the programme. (Haywood 2007, p. 79)

Findings from a recent research project on international-mindedness (Cause 2009) raise another concern with the IB learner profile. Findings suggest that it is possible to demonstrate all attributes of the IB learner profile yet not really demonstrate them in an international sense. For example, it is possible to be knowledgeable but not necessarily be knowledgeable about global issues. Cause argues that teachers often forget that these terms need to be understood with a strong sense of internationalism. If the attributes are taught by themselves and not embedded in a curriculum and school culture that offers a deep international experience, then the attributes merely provide the background to becoming a friendly person – not necessarily an internationally-minded one.

Haywood (2007) argues that 'there is no monopoly on the right way to think and act internationally and the educator ought to avoid any form of indoctrination even if well intended' (p. 85) - yet the IB learner profile states that an internationally-minded person must demonstrate all ten attributes of the learner profile, suggesting that there is one set way to act internationally-minded. In this way, Haywood claims that the IB learner profile is too dictatorial. Recent research substantiates this notion, as it suggests that educators teaching international-mindedness from the IB learner profile feel limited to developing the ten attributes, leaving little room for students to come to their own realisation of international-mindedness and develop their own expression of international-mindedness (Cause 2009).

a) *Research on International-Mindedness*

Theresa Hurley's (2008) publication International-Mindedness in Education represents one of the only books ever published solely on the topic of international-mindedness. The book discusses her single case study on international-mindedness at the IB secondary school she taught in, which was located in Chairo, Egypt. Her main research questions were:

1. How does international-mindedness manifest itself at AISS-E?
2. How is international-mindedness constructed by selected stakeholders of AISS-E, specifically, administrators, parents/guardians, students, and faculty?
3. How do selected stakeholders of AISS-E, specifically, administrators, parents/guardians, students, and faculty negotiate international-mindedness in their host culture? (p. 22)

Hurley interviewed 11 stakeholders from her school and analysed documents, artefacts and her own field notes to try and understand how international-mindedness was understood and constructed at one school at one point in time. Her conclusions support her initial premises of international-mindedness, as they indicate that international-mindedness is experienced differently by different people and, that human perceptions and perspectives of international-

minedness can vary from person to person. For this reason, she argues that international-mindedness should not have one definition because students and educational organisations will inevitably make their own sense of the term as they 'constantly reconstruct their own versions of reality' (p. 6). However, her conclusion to the project also suggests that a clear consensus is necessary. She concludes that the term is a 'slippery concept for the purposes of implementation and development in an educational setting' (p. 129).

Hurley urges for more study and research to be undertaken on the construction of international-mindedness as 'there is not yet any clear social consensus of how it manifest itself or how it can be effectively negotiated' (p. 140). The analysis of literature found her project and the fore mentioned project by Cause (2008) to be the only empirical studies ever completed on international-mindedness. This confirms Hurely's notion that there is a severe lack of attention to this topic. Considering the term now plays a significant role in many school mission statements around the world, one would think this topic would be worth far more attention.

Gunesch's (2007) recent research on international education included a focus on the overabundance of terms under the topic of international education. Gunesch's main research interests are cosmopolitanism, internationalism and globalisation, and the relationship between these terms. He acknowledges confusion in literature when defining international-mindedness and hypothesises that this could be because of the sheer overabundance of terms now circulating in current literature on international education. Gunesch, argues that it is time to stop squabbling over different terms and time to stop trying to further clarify international-mindedness and its relationship to international education. He suggests that the term be abolished altogether. As such, he proposes the model of 'cosmopolitanism as an alternative or complementary element' (p. 91) to international-mindedness:

It may come as a surprise that within the literature on international education, there is no single coherent picture of the 'internationalism' or 'international-mindedness' within the individual that, presumably, international education aims to develop. Indeed, current concerns over international education appear to centre on definitions of the field and of international schools, the nature of an international curriculum...even those contributions that imply aims and outcomes of international education in terms of desirable developments and transformations in the individual learner contain remarkable little in terms of clarification and theorization of their nature. (Gunesch 2007, p. 90).

The notion of cosmopolitanism could provide engagement with different cultural identities and cultural issues within and outside the nation-state but the model,

like literature suggested on the IB learner profile and other literature on international-mindedness, lacks objectives, specific aims and expectations for students of different ages. Gunesch acknowledges himself that cosmopolitanism 'is only concerned with cultural diversity' (p. 96). Yet at the same time, he states that 'cosmopolitanism can soundly and emphatically inspire international education's internationalism, now and in the future' (p. 97).

Although he proposes that cosmopolitanism could be viewed as complimentary to internationalism, his model leaves many quandaries. Furthermore, given that cosmopolitanism needs to be understood as a term to be amalgamated with internationalism, ensuring educators merge the two terms into one could make an even more ambiguous term to understand than international-mindedness, as educators would be faced with deconstructing two terms rather than one. Like the IB learner profile, his model lacks empirical research on its implementation – aspects educators suggest are necessary in order to reduce frustration when implementing it. Hence, his ideas stand to be tested.

Skelton's (2007) research on international-mindedness is also theoretical but is combined with recent brain research. He defines international-mindedness as 'a part of the continuum that represents the development of "self"' (p. 380) and argues that there are difficulties with children becoming internationally-minded. His central concern is that international-mindedness is 'the most complex development of the relationship between "self" and "other"' (p. 380). As such, he proposes that its development is problematic. Skelton states that 'the development of international mindedness, then, is anything but straightforward...we need to see international-mindedness as essentially problematic rather than straightforward' (p. 382).

Skelton argues that the complexity of international mindedness is often far too easily overlooked by educators. He claims that typically, educators comprehend the term with far too much optimism in hope that the frightening state of the world's environment and conflict between nations will be solved if everyone becomes internationally-minded. Although he puts a lot of emphasis in the difficulties of becoming internationally-minded, he believes that it would be very worthwhile finding out how to develop international-mindedness in children. In particular, he urges for a more sophisticated understanding of how to develop internationally-minded children so that teachers and parents can understand and take more of an active part in the process.

Skelton draws from the work of Gardner (1981) to demonstrate the difficulties of children developing international-mindedness. He argues that children initially start the continuum of human development in the egocentric stage, where they are incapable of thinking about themselves and unable to differentiate themselves from others. Gradually, their egocentric inclination starts



to decline as they move through the other stages of human development and the 'self' starts to develop and emerge. As the 'self' starts to develop the child can then start to develop an awareness of others around them. He claims that children must become aware of their 'self' before they can develop an understanding of other identities. Skelton proposes that the development of international-mindedness depends on each child successfully moving from the egocentric stage to a sophisticated understanding of their 'self' that understands the interdependence and independence of humans and nations at a global level.

Haywood (2007) acknowledges confusion over the term international-mindedness, but unlike Gunesch, he proposes that international-mindedness can be developed in children. However, he stresses that teachers need to understand that international-mindedness is expressed in different ways amongst different people. Haywood urges educators to move beyond the IB learner profile into new ways of thinking about international-mindedness. Central to his thesis is the contention that international-mindedness 'is actually a multifaceted entity that can be represented in a wide variety of practical forms' (Haywood 2007, p. 81). This coincides with Hurley's (2008) conclusion that international-mindedness is negotiated by different people in different ways.

Haywood proposes a typology to illustrate some of the various ways that international-mindedness may manifest itself. His typology breaks the different ways that international-mindedness can be articulated into the following broad categories: Diplomatic international-mindedness, Political international-mindedness, Economic and commercial international-mindedness, Spiritual international-mindedness, Multicultural international-mindedness, Human rights international-mindedness, Pacifist international-mindedness, Humanitarian international-mindedness, Environmentalist international-mindedness and Globalisation and international-mindedness. His typology is not an exhaustive list of all possible the ways that international-mindedness can be recognised but serves to demonstrate that international-mindedness is not an invariable, constant state of being. They also serve to demonstrate that international-mindedness can be represented in a variety of way by different people and at different times.

As such, Haywood stresses the need for students from different cultures to be encouraged to each come to their own realisation of international-mindedness rather than teachers promoting one set way of being internationally-minded:

The educator's role is not to direct students towards a particular style of international-mindedness, but is instead to encourage a predisposition towards international-mindedness in general that will allow students to develop their own responses and channels of expression...there can be many distinct ways of

educating for international-mindedness. We must not be limited by our current cultural conditions but neither must we promote any single model for international learning as universal in relevance or as superior to other forms. (Haywood 2007, pp. 85-6)

However it is important to remember that his research, like Skelton's, is theoretical. To draw any significant conclusions from this thesis, one would need to investigate if his ideas actually reflect school practice. As Hurley argues, the term international-mindedness represents an area of research that is severely lacking in empirical research. Hence, his thesis stands for further verification.

Conclusions from Cause's (2008) project on international-mindedness concur with Haywood and Hurley's premise of international-mindedness. Cause concludes:

International-mindedness can be articulated or expressed slightly differently and different priorities may be given to different attributes of international-mindedness that may affect the ways in which different people demonstrate international-mindedness. Therefore, it is not the teacher's role to indoctrinate the teacher's own understanding of international-mindedness. Rather, educators need to be open-minded to variations of the interpretation of international-mindedness and must not promote their own interpretation of the attributes or values of international-mindedness as the only acceptable way of being internationally-minded. (Cause 2009, p. 13)

However, the project did not pinpoint explicit and developmental strategies for developing international mindedness – areas currently lacking in research.

III. CONCLUSION

Clearly, confusion related to defining the term international-mindedness is a palpable recurring theme in all literature on international-mindedness (Cause 2009; Hayden & Thompson 1995; Haywood 2007; Hill 2007; Hurley 2008; Marshall 2007; Räsänen 2007; Sampatkumar 2007; Sylvester 2007). Given that the only projects ever completed on international-mindedness have not yet focused on the development of international-mindedness, it is too soon to consider moving forward with Gunesch's suggestions of abolishing the term altogether.

With the significant gap in research on international-mindedness and the absence of research on ways of developing it, what is happening in literature on international-mindedness is a developing acceptance that international-mindedness is too complex to describe. This idea can be clearly seen in the discussion on cosmopolitanism, where Gunesch (2004, 2007) proposes introducing a new term to replace international-mindedness. Even if Gunesch's premise is correct, further research is still necessary before we can confidently move towards the remote possibility of reconsidering this term's future.

Overall, the literature is newly emerging with several unresolved issues. Many scholars contributing to the literature base lack empirical evidence to support their proposals. Specifically, more research is necessary that focuses on developing curricula and assessment practices of which international-mindedness is an intrinsic part - even if this just means clearly underscoring the difficulties in providing answers. More empirical research could also work towards validating, contesting or extending existing theories on international-mindedness. It would enable some of the unresolved debates on international-mindedness to become constructive ideas that can encourage social consensus in the field of international education and our global thinking.

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