

From international to intercultural

Redefining the international school for a globalized world

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This article defines intercultural literacy as the competencies, understandings, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for effective cross-cultural engagement. A new multidimensional and developmental model for intercultural literacy is proposed with reference to previous culture shock and cross-cultural adjustment models, and some implications for international schools are suggested. International schools, it is argued, are in a unique position to develop understandings and practice in relation to intercultural literacy. Not only can they do so – but they should.

KEYWORDS globalization, intercultural, intercultural literacy, international school

Introduction

International schools, as a category of educational institutions, emerged in the 1950s alongside a dramatic increase in the number of expatriate westerners sojourning in foreign countries. The assumptions that underlie our understandings of what an international school is and what it exists for, however, have since that time altered radically. The world in which they exist too has altered and with it the experience of being ‘international’, of

Cet article définit l’interculturalité comme étant les compétences, la compréhension, les attitudes, la connaissance des langues, la participation et les identités nécessaires à un engagement interculturel efficace. Un nouveau modèle multidimensionnel et développemental de l’interculturalité est proposé en faisant référence aux modèles antérieurs de choc culturel et d’ajustement interculturel. L’auteur suggère également quelques implications pour les écoles internationales. Il est avancé que les écoles internationales sont dans une position privilégiée pour développer la compréhension et la pratique se rapportant à l’interculturalité. Non seulement peuvent-elles le faire, elles devraient le faire.

Este artículo define la interculturalidad como las competencias, conocimientos, actitudes, dominio de idiomas, participación e identidades necesarios para comprometerse realmente con otras culturas. Se propone un nuevo modelo multidimensional y de desarrollo de interculturalidad, haciendo referencia a modelos anteriores de choque y de adaptación cultural, y se señalan algunas repercusiones para los colegios internacionales. El artículo apunta que los colegios internacionales se encuentran en una situación privilegiada para desarrollar conocimientos y práctica relacionadas con la interculturalidad. Más que una opción, debería constituir una obligación para los colegios.



being 'expatriate' or being 'foreign'. The meanings we attach to these terms, and particularly to the term 'international', deserve attention.

In this article I will give some attention to the term 'international' as it applies to schooling and will ask what it means at the beginning of the 21st century to be 'international', or to be an 'international school'. I will also introduce a new term in this context, 'intercultural', and will argue that international schools might be better conceptualized as 'intercultural' rather than 'international' in the globalized world of the early 21st century. Finally, with reference to a new developmental model of intercultural literacy, I will suggest some directions for schools wishing to redefine themselves in this way; wishing to promote teaching and learning for intercultural literacy.

What is intercultural literacy?

I define intercultural literacy as the understandings, competencies, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for successful cross-cultural engagement. While the term 'international' gives primacy to nationality as the presumed salient and significant identity construct, the more significant identity construct highlighted by the term 'intercultural' is culture.

When Hirsch (1987) introduced the term 'cultural literacy', he raised the ire of those arguing for a more inclusive vision of education, and unwittingly raised the question: who defines the culture in cultural literacy? Hirsch's cultural literacy was a white, middle class, US and gendered male construct. The cultural literacy he advocated meant familiarity with a body of facts – with the cultural symbols and classical works which he saw as defining mainstream American culture.

The concept of intercultural literacy I have proposed (Heyward, 2000), and further develop here, challenges such narrow cultural constructs. First, it conceives of literacy as including competencies, attitudes and identities in addition to understandings and, second, it suggests a literacy that crosses cultural boundaries. Building on the efforts of others at redefining cultural literacy (Fitzgerald, 1991, 1997; Hughes and McCann, 1991; Schuster, 1989; Williams and Snipper, 1990; Willinsky, 1992), this definition is both multidimensional and inclusive. The interculturally literate person, in these terms, possesses the understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities necessary for successful living and working in a cross-cultural or pluralist setting. He or she has the background required effectively to 'read' a second culture, to interpret its symbols and negotiate its meanings in a practical day-to-day context.

International schools should, I believe, address the issue of intercultural literacy both in the curriculum and in how their institutions are structured. Intercultural literacy is not only important to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning in a cross-cultural or pluralist setting; it is a crucial literacy for international students – if they are to be prepared for success in a globalized world. This is particularly true when we consider evidence which suggests that many international school graduates pursue careers leading to senior management positions either in overseas missions or business (Gerner et al., 1991). Without being given support to develop intercultural literacy, as is made clear in the model discussed below, students (and others) are at risk of responding in negative ways to the cross-cultural experience. Without intercultural literacy, expatriates and others, living and working in an international setting risk misunderstandings and intercultural blunders that can be extremely costly to both individuals and organizations.

On a broader scale, intercultural literacy can be seen as a crucial element in the creation of a safe, sustainable and just global community. The significance, for example, of the competency that enables individuals to hold multiple perspectives, described by Bennett (1993) as ‘contextual evaluation’, to see issues from more than one viewpoint, cannot be overestimated. The cost to the world of leaders who lack this aspect of intercultural literacy is enormous.

Modelling the cross-cultural experience: from culture shock to intercultural learning

Early studies of cultural adjustment among foreign students studying in US universities described the pattern of adjustment to a foreign culture as a U-curve, indicating a typical dip occurring during the period of sojourn and ending in a final period of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955; Sewell and Davidson, 1956). The U-curve can be interpreted as a three-stage model of adjustment as follows:

Stage 1: A period of initial enthusiasm in which the sojourner is essentially a spectator, absorbing the sights and forming impressions with limited interaction with host nationals.

Stage 2: A period of disenchantment in which the sojourner’s knowledge of the host culture has advanced sufficiently for an awareness to develop that progress is blocked by an inability to communicate or understand the cultural norms.

Stage 3: A period of recovery in which the sojourner becomes aware of the subtle cues of the host culture and begins to develop a fluency in the language.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963, 1966) extended the concept further to describe both the sojourner's adaptation to a foreign culture and readjustment to the home culture as a W curve. In this case we can add a second dip and a further two stages to the model. A period of re-entry crisis, which is described as typically less intense than the dip at stage 2, is followed by a final readjustment period. The concepts of the U-curve and the W-curve fit closely with that of culture shock. Oberg (1958, in Adler 1986) is generally credited with introducing this concept, the term having been coined by Cora DuBois in 1951 (Paige, 1993; Weaver, 1993). Culture shock was seen as a malady brought on by the cross-cultural experience. In the decade which followed Oberg's formulation of the culture shock theory, the concept was further developed – and popularized – and a number of stage models were proposed. Often concerned with patterns of adjustment in Americans posted abroad, they all presented a similar pattern for describing the development of culture shock in four stages, sometimes with a fifth stage to allow for reverse culture shock on returning home (Oberg, 1960; Pearson, 1964; and Smalley, 1963 – all in Brein and David, 1971; Oberg and Foster, 1962; and Sill, 1968 – both in Adler 1986). The four stages are as follows:

Stage 1: A period of incubation during which time the sojourner may feel highly elated. Characterized by the excitement and euphoria of foreign travel. Knowledge of local customs is superficial and the focus is more on cultural similarities than differences.

Stage 2: A period of crisis relating from genuine difficulties that the sojourner encounters in a different culture. Personal, social and cultural differences intrude into the individual's image of self-security. A stage of hostility.

Stage 3: A period of recovery in which the sojourner begins to understand some of the cues of the host culture. The individual begins to learn more of the local culture, makes friends with hosts and effects a gradual recovery. A stage of improved adjustment.

Stage 4: A period of near or complete recovery in which the sojourner accepts the host culture. Characterized by a more complete understanding of the host culture, and an ability to cope with stresses. A stage of biculturalism.

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The concept of culture shock was influential in identifying and giving a name to the difficulties experienced by those confronted with the challenge of adjusting to a second culture. Equally, the stage model offers a useful analysis of the typical pattern of that experience. The metaphor of culture shock as an illness, however, is disempowering and misleadingly negative, characterizing the experience of confronting an alien culture as typically producing a physical, psychological and emotional trauma as a prelude to adjustment. An alternative and more positive view which emerged in the 1980s characterized culture shock as a learning experience (Bochner and Furnham, 1982; Taft, 1986). Adler (1986: 29), for example, defined culture shock as:

. . . an experience of personality in culture. It consists of the psychological events that occur to a person in the initial phases of his encounter with a different culture. . . . Rather than being only a disease for which adaptation is the cure, culture shock is likewise at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience. It is an experience in self understanding and change.

Hanvey (1986) similarly recast culture shock as 'cross-cultural awareness' and proposed a developmental model for cross-cultural awareness learning that paralleled the earlier models. Hanvey's model described four levels of information, mode and interpretation, the latter developing from 'unbelievable' (exotic, bizarre), through a second variant of 'unbelievable' (frustrating, irrational), to 'believable cognitively' and finally 'believable because of subjective familiarity' (Hanvey, 1986: 20).

More recent models continue to conceptualize the process as learning, demonstrating a greater appreciation of the complex context of the cross-cultural experience. Christensen (1989) proposed a five-stage developmental model for cross-cultural awareness, which distinguishes between the process as experienced by 'minority' and 'majority' individuals (individuals representing minority and majority cultures within typically western societies), as follows:

- Stage 1: Unawareness
- Stage 2: Beginning awareness
- Stage 3: Conscious awareness
- Stage 4: Consolidated awareness
- Stage 5: Transcendent awareness

For Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992), intergroup contact moved through a series of phases: pre-contact, contact, conflict, crisis and adaptations.

Meyer (1991), writing from the foreign-language-learning perspective, suggested three levels of intercultural competency: monocultural, intercultural and transcultural. Elliott and Baumgart (1995) drew on Hanvey (1986), Christensen (1989) and others in formulating a five-stage model for the analysis of students' intercultural understanding, while Bennett (1993) proposed a six-stage developmental model of intercultural sensitivity:

Stage 1: Denial

Stage 2: Defence

Stage 3: Minimization

Stage 4: Acceptance

Stage 5: Adaptation

Stage 6: Integration

Grove and Torbiorn's (1993) model outlines four stages of adjustment, differentiating applicability of behaviour and clarity of mental frame of reference. Gudykunst (1994) proposed four stages in the development of consciousness and competence in relation to cross-cultural communication: unconsciously incompetent, consciously incompetent, consciously competent, and unconsciously competent.

The various models discussed above arise from a range of theoretical perspectives and practical concerns. The early 'culture shock' models arose from concerns with the adjustment of sojourners in an alien cultural setting. The impetus for later 'cultural awareness' and intergroup contact models expanded to include concerns with the difficulties of immigrant and minority individuals and groups in integrating with mainstream societies. The 'intercultural learning' models discussed arose from the concerns of educators with the attitudes and understandings of students in relation to foreign cultures: Kordes (1991) and Meyer (1991) with those of European foreign-language students; Elliott and Baumgart (1995) with mainstream Australian school students. Bennett's (1993) and Grove and Torbiorn's (1993) models are concerned with describing the developmental stages for intercultural sensitivity and adjustment from an intercultural communication perspective, and relate to the needs of trainers and educators to define the developmental stages in order better to set goals, structure curricula and design training interventions. Gudykunst (1994) similarly writes from an intercultural communication perspective.

All of these models contribute to a picture of the cross-cultural experience, focusing on varying aspects of that experience. While they clearly differ in both detail and emphasis, taken together they form a not

inconsistent picture of staged development from naïve monoculturalism to informed and integrated pluralism. The more recent models do not in essence dispute the basic models first introduced in the 1950s and 1960s. What they do is contribute by adding specificity and greater detail in response both to the development of theory and to the changing global context for cross-cultural contact. Whereas in the earlier models the metaphor for the cross-cultural experience was culture shock as an illness, recent models see the experience as multidimensional and one of learning and personal growth.

A multidimensional model for the development of intercultural literacy

My own model (see Table 1) does not depart from the tradition described. Rather, building on the earlier models, it integrates the key features reiterated in many into a more explicitly articulated multidimensional model. Casting the process in terms of learning rather than adaptation or acculturation, it assumes an empowering additive process with an idealized end point of integrated pluralism. In this, the model is consistent with previous efforts which variously describe the end point as 'multicultural man' (Adler, 1986), 'mediating person' (Bochner, 1982) and ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1993). The model also posits (with Kalantzis et al., 1990; Parmenter, 1999; Pearce, 1998) the reality of multiple cultural identities. In characterizing the desired end point as intercultural literacy, I highlight this focus on learning. It should be noted, however, that the end point is not necessarily achievable for all. Achievement of intercultural literacy is clearly dependent on many variables, including the presence of appropriate social and cultural supports, perhaps supported by educational and training interventions. The developmental model of intercultural literacy I propose is thus multidimensional, recognizing the significance of interrelated learning of understandings, competencies, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities. It is intended to provide a tool to assist educators in understanding the development of intercultural literacy and thus being able to facilitate the process.

Drawing on earlier definitions (Geertz, 1973; Hall, 1976), the model assumes that culture is constructed, it defines groups within and between societies, it is fluid and changing, and it is learned. It is through the experience of confronting oneself in a cross-cultural situation, that is, through becoming interculturally literate, that the individual learns what culture is: learns both something of his or her native culture, something of a second culture and something of the concept of culture in the abstract.

Table 1 A multidimensional model for the development of intercultural literacy

	<i>Monocultural level 1 Limited awareness Unconsciously incompetent</i>	<i>Monocultural Level 2 Naïve awareness Unconsciously incompetent</i>	<i>Monocultural Level 3 Engagement- distancing Consciously incompetent</i>	<i>Crosscultural level Emerging intercultural literacy Consciously competent</i>	<i>Intercultural level Bicultural or transcultural Unconsciously competent</i>
<i>Understandings</i>	No significant intercultural understandings. Unaware of own culture or of the significance of culture in human affairs.	Aware of touristic, exotic and stereotypical aspects of other culture(s). Little understanding of metaculture.	Aware of significant cultural differences. Other culture(s) perceived as irrational and unbelievable.	Increasingly sophisticated understandings of socio-political and intergroup aspects of culture and metaculture.	Aware of how culture(s) feel and operate from the standpoint of the insider. Understandings of primary and metaculture and global interdependence.
<i>Competencies</i>	No significant intercultural competencies.	No significant intercultural competencies.	No significant intercultural competencies.	Developing competencies include mindfulness, empathy, perspective-taking, tolerance and communication.	Advanced competencies include mindfulness, empathy, perspective-taking, tolerance and communication.
<i>Attitudes</i>	No significant intercultural attitudes. Assumes that all groups share similar values and traits. Value neutral.	Naïve and stereotypical attitudes which may be positive, negative or ambivalent.	Typically negative attitudes. Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.	Differentiated, dynamic and realistic attitudes. An overall respect for integrity of culture(s).	Differentiated, dynamic and realistic attitudes. An overall respect for integrity of culture(s) accompanied by legitimate and informed

<i>Participation</i>	No significant participation or unaware of cultural dimension of contact.	Tourism, early contact, 'honeymoon' period or experience of culture(s) through texts, media etc. 'Living alongside' rather than 'living with'.	Culture conflict. 'Living alongside' rather than 'living with'.	Increasing cross-cultural engagement and development of meaningful relationships. 'Living with' rather than 'living alongside'.	Well established cross-cultural/transcultural friendships and/or working relationships. 'Living in' the culture(s). The 'mediating' person.
<i>Language proficiencies</i>	No significant second language competencies. May be unaware of language differences.	Aware of language differences. Possible ability or communicate at a superficial level in the second language(s) (greetings etc.)	Limited functional proficiencies in the second language(s).	Language learning. Increasingly sophisticated knowledge of and ability to communicate in second language(s).	Bilingual or multilingual understanding and proficiencies.
<i>Identities</i>	Unformed cultural identity.	Basic primary cultural identity characterised by stereotypic comparisons with other cultures.	Culture shock may force an examination of cultural identity.	Increasingly highly developed and secure primary cultural identity. Awareness of multiple cultural identities.	Bicultural or transcultural identity. 'Species' or 'global' identity may emerge. Ability to consciously shift between multiple cultural identities.

Without some level of intercultural literacy the individual remains essentially ignorant of his or her primary culture and characteristically ethnocentric.

Like earlier models described, this model is phenomenological in the sense that it derives from the subjective experience of individuals engaging with a second culture. It assumes a constructivist theory of learning, in the sense that humans learn by constructing new meanings, by drawing on previous stores of meanings and reinterpreting—reconnecting—realigning these in light of new experiences. Thus culture is conceptualized as a subjective meaning state, and becoming interculturally literate as a process of creating or constructing new meanings.

Pearce (2001) contrasts the convergent tendencies of what he describes as ‘new world’ theorists with the divergent, pluralist tendencies of ‘old world’ theorists, arguing that, from an ‘old world’ perspective, an idealized end point is likely to be divergent and pluralist, while from a ‘new world’ perspective it is likely to be convergent – a single transhuman identity; perhaps the transculture that Willis, Enloe and Minoura (1994) describe in their study of international school students in Kobe, Japan. Bennett (1993) recognizes the two alternatives in his model but places the convergent vision within an ethnocentric stage, seeing ‘transcendent universalism’ as a stage in which individuals minimize cultural difference by positing a universal culture. Bennett is clear in defining the end point as pluralist and relativist. In my own model I see the two contrasted visions as not incompatible.

An idealized end point of the process is posited as a convergent ‘global’, ‘species’ or ‘transcultural’ identity, while at the same time the model assumes plurality and posits ‘multiple identities’ as an end point. In this construct, a universal ‘species identity’ forms just one layer in an individual’s cultural repertoire of multiple identities, while at the same time valuing the diversity of other cultural identities from the very specific and local, through national to international/regional or otherwise based.

Cross-cultural contact and the development of intercultural literacy

The underlying theoretical premise of this developmental model of intercultural literacy is that intercultural literacy is learnt in a cross-cultural context. It is the shock of cross-cultural contact, the crisis of engagement, that stimulates the learning necessary for intercultural literacy (Adler, 1986; Hanvey, 1986; Kordes, 1991; Meyer, 1991; Triandis et al., 1994). Without cross-cultural contact, the learning can only ever be about another culture,

and since intercultural literacy is defined in terms of successful cross-cultural engagement it requires a cross-cultural experience. Understandings and competencies that reflect a high level of intercultural literacy develop in response to the experience of confronting another culture. Equally, it is through the experience of confronting oneself in another culture that the individual's own cultural identity and interculturally literate attitudes are formed.

The premise that intercultural literacy is acquired in a cross-cultural context may also be thought of as deriving initially from the 'contact hypothesis' of Allport (1954). Allport's hypothesis has been widely researched and debated, particularly among social psychologists studying intergroup contact. Miller and Brewer (1984: xv) restate the hypothesis as 'the idea that prejudice and hostility between members of segregated groups can be reduced by promoting the frequency and intensity of intergroup contact'. This hypothesis, perhaps since it reflects common sense, has been widely accepted by policy-makers, notably in relation to the desegregation policies adopted in American schools in the 1960s and 1970s, and more recently to mainstreaming, integration, inclusion, bicultural and multicultural programmes in schools in Britain, Australia, the US and throughout the western world. In the international school context we can also see the common-sense 'contact hypothesis' reflected in mission statements and a commonly held belief that the 'international' experience 'broadens the mind' in the sense that it produces more tolerant, interculturally sensitive individuals.

My own experience and research, however, suggests otherwise (Heyward, 2000). Far from automatically leading to intercultural literacy, the international experience and with it the international schooling experience often produce the subtractive, negative responses of cultural chauvinism and distancing from the host culture, marginalization or 'passing'. The cross-cultural experience is thus, I would argue, a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the development of intercultural literacy. The key question is 'what makes the difference?'. Why do some students respond to the international or intercultural experience in negative ways, while others progress to become interculturally literate? The work of social psychologists such as Sherif (1966), Triandis (1975), Miller and Brewer (1984), Johnson, Johnson and Murayama (1984) and Stephan (1985) offers part of the answer, by suggesting the conditions which are likely to result in reduced prejudice from cross-cultural contact. While formal curricula may be significant in this context, research suggests that it is the social context within which cross-cultural experience occurs that is likely to make the most difference (Heyward, 2000). In a supportive social context

intercultural literacy learning is facilitated, whereas in a non-supportive context distancing or identity confusion may result. Specifically, the social and learning environments of the school should be structured so that, in the cross-cultural context, cooperation rather than competition is the focus, and students are ideally of equal status, and share a similar level of competency. Students should be encouraged to develop friendships with individuals within the group and, if possible, opportunities should be provided for the contact to continue out of school and in a variety of contexts over time. The contact should, ideally, be voluntary (Johnson et al., 1984; Stephan, 1985). Pairing new students with a 'cultural mediator' can be a powerful strategy (Bennett, 1993).

The model I propose (Table 1) highlights the period of first real engagement with a second culture as the critical point for intercultural literacy – Monocultural level 3, Engagement or Distancing. If the appropriate supports are available to students at this point, the outcome is likely to be continued learning, cross-cultural engagement and intercultural literacy. If not, negative responses that result in arrested development or distancing are likely to result.

Writing from an intergroup perspective, Bochner (1982, 1986) describes the four possible outcomes of cross-cultural engagement as:

- marginalization (in societal terms, segregation);
- 'passing' (assimilation);
- chauvinism (in its most extreme form, genocide or ethnic cleansing); and
- mediation (integration, pluralism).

Bochner's model is paralleled by that of Berry and his colleagues (Berry, 1984; Berry et al., 1986, 1992) with the four alternative acculturation strategies defined as separation, assimilation, marginalization and integration. Similarly Bennett (1993) refers to forms of denial and defence as isolation or separation, denigration or superiority, and reversal. The concept of marginalization is given special treatment in Bennett's model, with the possibility posited of a positive form of marginalization as an idealized end point. Each of the four alternative responses is readily identifiable within international school students.

The international school: defined by difference

It has been estimated that somewhere between 1000 and 2000 international schools, or schools that describe themselves as international,

exist in the world (ECIS 1999; Findlay 1997; Hayden and Thompson, 1995; International Schools Service 1998). Taken together, this represents a significant network of schools, teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, parents and students.

A lack of consensus concerning what international education is, what might constitute an international school, and the relationship between the two, however, makes generalizations difficult (Hayden and Thompson, 1995). In many instances, the term 'international' could be more accurately translated as 'foreign' or 'overseas', the mission of such schools being to provide a specific national education to an expatriate community off-shore.

While it may not be profitable to overemphasize this distinction, it is nonetheless true to say that the vast majority of international schools have been established with a pragmatic rather than 'ideology-driven' foundation (Bartlett, 1998; Matthews, 1989; Pearce, 1998). The implications for intercultural literacy learning are significant. It can be assumed, for example, that within the Japanese International School of Jakarta, the American School in London and the Lycée Français de Los Angeles, a range of assumptions about culture and the purpose of international schooling are likely to colour responses to the issue of intercultural literacy.

Aside from differing national orientations the foundations of international schools vary, from those established to serve foreign military bases and embassies, to church missionary schools, independent city schools and those established by multinational oil and mining companies to serve their isolated expatriate communities. What varying conceptions of culture and of the relevance of intercultural literacy to curriculum, then, might exist among these schools and their communities? And from this basis of diversity, what is it that defines an international school? A number of attempts to address this issue have resulted in a range of definitions (Jonietz and Harris, 1991; Leach, 1969; Terwilliger, 1972). Matthews (1989), in an attempt to draw the line between distinctively international schools and those offering a transplanted national curriculum, defines an international school as one that has:

- an international teaching staff;
- an international student body;
- a board of governors that represents different cultural views, especially if it has a substantial impact on policy formation;
- an international academic curriculum, which goes beyond the simple adoption of 'international' programmes such as IB or IGCSE, to encourage international understanding;

- a broad-based non-academic programme which encourages, and facilitates cultural mixing and cross-cultural fertilization (even though it may not appear to be happening as extensively as desired)

I do not, in this article, wish to enter the debate about what constitutes or does not constitute an international school. International schools as a group of self-defined institutions are here to stay, whether or not they fit Matthews' definition – and the number grows year by year. What I do want to argue is that these schools, to a greater or lesser extent, are in a unique position to contribute to the development of understandings and a methodology for the teaching of intercultural literacy. To do so, however, they may need to reinvent or redefine themselves – particularly in terms of their relationship with their cultural environments. While the 'ideology driven' international schools that fit Matthews' definition appear most likely to offer insights in this context, I wish to argue that all international schools are well placed for the task. Further, I wish to argue that international schools should use their position to advantage. Not only can they teach for intercultural literacy, but they should.

The one thing that makes international schools different, that makes them 'international', is that they offer an alternative to local, national approaches to education. In doing so they tend to cater for expatriates and foreigners, and to draw together a community of international people, either a group of similar nationals in a foreign setting or a more eclectic group of expatriates and foreigners – sometimes with a mix of local families. It is this unique position that creates what I have described as the opportunity, and perhaps the obligation, to teach for intercultural literacy.

A new context for international schools

Why should international schools bother with intercultural literacy? For those that meet the criteria of Matthews' definition, established explicitly to teach an international curriculum and to foster 'cultural mixing and cross-cultural fertilization', the answer might be in their mission statements. Teachers, administrators and parents from the larger group of schools established to provide a specific national curriculum to overseas students, however, might well ask 'what has intercultural literacy to do with us?'. Such schools exist to minimize the educational disadvantage of an overseas posting; to provide continuity of educational experience for expatriate students within their national education system.

What I want to suggest here is that the new context in which all international schools find themselves demands that attention be paid to the issue of intercultural literacy. What made sense in the world of the 1950s no longer makes sense in the early 21st century. In the 1950s an overseas posting meant real isolation for families and expatriate communities. In the 21st century efficient transport, telecommunications, satellite television, email and internet make that isolation, for most, a thing of the past. In the 1950s, nation states were the most significant unit for structuring global human relations and, in a global context, cultural identity. National borders mattered. In the 21st century complex cultural, economic, political and human flows ignore national borders, and national cultural identities form just one layer in the multiple cultural identities of human beings (Appadurai, 1990; Pearce, 1998). Business in the 21st century is conducted between corporations and individuals whose national identity is far from clear. Wars are commonly fought not between nation states, but between ethnic and cultural groups within and across national borders. Individuals form non-locational culture-based communities and relationships. Locational communities, including nations, are becoming cultural patchworks. While the nation state remains significant, the more significant identity construct in the 21st century, it may be argued, is not nationality, but culture – and culture is a far more elusive and complex construct.

The significance of these changes in the context of international schools is twofold. First, the world in which international schools exist and for which students are being prepared has changed. The kinds of competencies, understandings, attitudes and identities that might have worked in the 1950s are no longer adequate. In fact they may be quite counter-productive in relation to achieving success in a globalized world. Rigid national curricula are out of step with the realities of a globalized, interconnected and interdependent world. Second, international school communities – the teaching faculty, the parents and the students themselves – are different. Without an understanding of intercultural literacy and its implications for students, schools understand neither the world of their students nor the students themselves.

Fortunately, the last 50 years has seen significant development in terms of curricula for international schools. In an increasing number of schools, a genuine attempt is now being made to define and deliver the authentically international curriculum envisaged by Matthews (1989). The International Baccalaureate (IB) is widely offered in international schools, with over 1300 member schools in more than 100 countries (IBO, 2002). It now caters for students from primary through to senior secondary years and represents one significant attempt to internationalize the curriculum of these schools.

The IB Diploma was devised in the 1960s to provide an internationally accepted pathway for students from international schools to enter the top universities of the western world. Its origins thus mirror the pragmatic foundations of the international schools for which it was designed. The IB Organization has evolved, however, as a significant force for internationalization of curricula in both the international and the national schools in which its programmes have now been adopted. The mission statement for IB emphasizes citizenship in an international context and highlights values consistent with the concept of intercultural literacy:

Beyond intellectual rigour and high academic standards, strong emphasis is placed in the ideals of international understanding and responsible citizenship, to the end that IB students may become critical and compassionate thinkers, lifelong learners and informed participants in local and world affairs, conscious of the shared humanity that binds all people together while respecting the variety of cultures and attitudes that makes for the richness of life. (IBO, 1996)

While significant developments have occurred, however, with the addition of optional studies in such areas as the History and Culture of the Islamic World, Peace Studies, World Religions, Marine Science and Environmental Studies, the degree to which the curriculum either is genuinely international or remains eurocentric and western-biased is a matter of ongoing debate within IB circles. Bartlett (1998) argues that the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) develops competencies such as multiple perspective-taking and open-mindedness. This can be seen as aligning with intercultural literacy. The extent to which IB programmes may or may not contribute towards the development of intercultural literacy in terms of learning outcomes, however, remains an open question.

Intercultural literacy and the international school student

Who are the students of international schools? Langford (1998: 28–9), while noting the diverse nature of international schools, suggests that a pattern is emerging for defining them based in part on their school populations being characterized by:

1. their multinational composition;
2. fairly high levels of student turnover as a consequence of career paths of a professional parent body which in turn may result in childhoods of transiency and international mobility for such students;

3. a very strong likelihood that their pupils will not complete their educations or attend university in the country where the international school is located, but rather will be required to face the challenge of moving on to another foreign location or alternatively repatriating to their passport countries to continue their education;
4. the strong probability that the cultural development of their pupils will be influenced by the culture of the host country as well as by the various cultures that they collectively represent.

Many of the students in international schools are international people, the third culture kids (TCKs) described first by Useem (1966, 1973) and more recently by Pollock and Van Reken (1999) and recast as 'transculturals' (Willis et al., 1994), 'global nomads' (McCaig 1996, cited in Pollock and Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti, 1998) and 'internationally mobile adolescents' (Gerner et al., 1991). Many are second- or even third-generation 'international' people, who are likely to spend only brief periods in their passport country, often for tertiary study before returning 'overseas' to take up 'international' careers (Gerner et al., 1991). Some are the offspring of long-term expatriates, themselves members of a mobile international community. Their identity, it is suggested, is not primarily with their 'home' culture – since they may have never lived there – nor with the 'host' culture, but rather with a newly evolving global transculture – an international diaspora of globally mobile expatriates.

A consistent picture of these students has emerged as possessing strong self-esteem, advanced social skills and ability to form friendships, linguistic and cognitive flexibility, intercultural awareness and tolerance, advanced capacities for empathy, multiple perspective-taking, communication, acceptance, open and broad minded attitudes (Langford, 1998; Pollock and Van Reken, 1999; Willis et al., 1994). These are the very characteristics that may be thought of as corresponding to intercultural literacy. Bennett (1993: 56), however, in reference to young children raised abroad, makes the important distinction between learned and 'accidental' pluralism, suggesting that while those in the second category may 'understand and even respect the differences with which they are familiar, . . . they may be unable to recognise or use this sensitivity as part of a generalised skill in adapting to cultural difference'.

In my own view, the 'Third Culture' becomes one more layer of cultural identity for TCKs and international people. If, however, individual international school students identify with this Third Culture but do not demonstrate the flexibility to move between other cultural frameworks, to take multiple perspectives, to engage effectively with local cultures,

then they are not in my terms interculturally literate. It seems likely that TCKs born and raised 'overseas' do not experience the 'crisis of engagement' necessary to stimulate intercultural literacy learning. Thus, while they may possess many of the characteristics of intercultural literacy, they may not be fully interculturally literate.

For many, the 'crisis of engagement', the shock that stimulates learning, is likely to occur only when they repatriate to their 'home' culture – often for the purpose of tertiary study (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999). At this point, the same possibilities described above apply – the individual may retreat into chauvinism (an exaggerated affirmation of their third culture and rejection of the new 'home' culture), 'passing' (rejecting the third culture), may become marginalized (drifting between the old third culture and the new 'home' culture), or advance in intercultural literacy learning to become integrated and pluralist, balancing the old and the new. Clearly, more work is required to integrate the implications of this and other models of intercultural learning with understandings generated from research into TCKs and global nomads. Such work could be of great benefit to the international school community.

Lessons for international schools

In this article I have argued that international schools in a globalized world should give attention to the issue of intercultural literacy – that, in this sense, 'international' might be better redefined as 'intercultural'. Intercultural literacy, as defined, is an issue of significance for students in all schools in a pluralist global community. International schools, however, are in a special position to contribute to the development of new understandings in relation to teaching and learning for intercultural literacy.

The implications of the model and supporting theory presented require working out in practice, in the real and messy world of classrooms, schools and communities. For now, I want to suggest some directions for schools and to encourage reflection on how the structures of international schools may either hinder or support the development of intercultural literacy. The key point is that intercultural literacy learning requires a crisis of engagement, an authentic cross-cultural experience. This is what gives the international school a unique advantage in relation to teaching for intercultural literacy. The irony is that international schools often work to shelter students from that engagement. The greatest cultural resource for international schools, I want to suggest, is not their own internal multicultural mix of dislocated students and faculty, although this too is valuable, but rather the deep, rich, dynamic and diverse cultures of their

host environment. The greater the distance that international schools maintain from host cultures, however, the less likely it is that students will engage with them.

Paradoxically, the path to intercultural literacy is likely to lie not primarily in the international world of the expatriate community, but in the traditional, deeply rooted cultures outside the expatriate compound. In curriculum terms, the study of one culture in depth allows the 'thick description' recommended by Geertz (1973) and is likely to promote far greater development in intercultural literacy than a 'Cook's tour' of the world's cultures or annual dress-up international festivals (Degenhardt and McKay, 1986, 1988). This argument, of course, runs counter to the foundation of many international schools and to the popular wisdom that accompanies it. International schools have traditionally been established in order to minimize the discomfort and perceived educational disadvantage that accompany engagement with host cultures (Cohen, 1977). They are defined by difference, by the distance they place between themselves and the host culture.

International schools in developing nations face further obstacles in this context. In being defined by distance, they are also defined by exclusivity, by economic and political advantage, by elitism. Genuine attempts to engage with local cultures may unwittingly reinforce attitudes of superiority and paternalism, of cultural chauvinism. Disparities in salary and conditions for host-nation teachers, coupled with the problems of cross-cultural teaching, also tend to devalue the study of local culture and language, further reinforcing distance and chauvinistic attitudes.

Where international schools are defined in terms of a specific expatriate national culture and education system, they face additional complications in relation to intercultural literacy. As described above, one common response to the cross-cultural experience is exaggerated affirmation of the home culture, of its symbols and values. Expatriate communities can tend to encourage this response in attempting to cope with the dislocation of expatriation. National days, sports, festivals, pastimes and causes take on an exaggerated significance, creating the common phenomenon of the American or Australian abroad who becomes 'more' American or Australian than his or her family and friends 'back home'. Nationally oriented international schools are a part of this dynamic, often unwittingly fuelling the chauvinistic response.

The solutions to these challenges lie, I believe, not in denying the importance of 'home' cultural values, which represents in Bochner's (1982, 1986) terms 'passing' or in Bennett's (1993) 'reversal', nor in the defensive distancing from local cultures, which represents a chauvinistic or

contra-identification response. Rather, schools should examine their own structures, their curriculum, their school-based cultures, in light of understandings about the development of intercultural literacy represented in the model (Table 1). Strategies for supporting intercultural literacy learning include genuine equal-status engagements with local host cultures; collaborative activities and joint projects where students from international and local schools both clearly benefit from the experience. Where possible, enrolling local students and integrating curricular approaches (such as with bilingual programmes) are also likely to be valuable strategies, along with the use of cooperative learning approaches in mixed cultural teams.

The model also suggests strategies for supporting students in the process of transition, either newly arriving or departing. An understanding of the developmental process described in the model enables teachers and counsellors to recognize the stages and to support individual students through them – particularly the crucial stages of engagement or distancing. At this point the most valuable strategy appears likely to be pairing students with a cultural mediator, that is, a friend or mentor who is sufficiently literate in both the home and host cultures to be able to ‘translate’ the new culture, to enable the learner to begin to develop his or her own repertoire of understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities; to become interculturally literate.

Finally, the intercultural literacy levels of teaching faculty and of parents is a critical factor. Students form their responses to the cross-cultural experience primarily through interaction with the key ‘validators’ of the home (Pearce, 1998) and, for older students, with peers in the school environment. Teachers or intercultural trainers, suggests Bennett (1993), should be at least one step ahead in developmental terms. Any programme to address the issue of intercultural literacy in an international school could therefore profitably commence with professional development and intercultural training for teachers and staff, followed by the development of school-based responses in curriculum and the broader social-cultural structuring of the school, and then with parent-education programmes.

In this article I have argued, with reference to a new developmental model of intercultural literacy, for a reconceptualization of international schools as intercultural. While there remains much to be done in the way of research and the development of practical programs in this area, it should be clear that intercultural literacy, as defined, is now a major concern for international schools. By addressing this issue, schools and educators address the needs of students as individuals to be educated for a globalized future, the needs of schools to understand today’s international

students and their world, and the needs of humanity to define and create a workable, sustainable and pluralist global community.

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