

Toward International Cooperation in Education

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THE use of the word *international* in connection with education generally calls to mind years of worthy efforts by many organizations, including ASCD, to promote international *understanding through* education. Useful as this line of endeavor continues to be, it suffers from several limitations.

A first limitation is that the language, "education for international understanding," implies a goal useful in itself. There is a vague assumption that somehow international understanding will contribute to world peace, but how the understanding is to function to this end is far from clear. To work merely for understanding is a partial program, an essentially passive one.

This leads to a second limitation. The language implies an attainable goal. Yet, how much "understanding" is enough? How does one determine when such an ill-defined goal has been achieved? Understanding, by itself, goes into some sort of bottomless pit.

A third limitation is that the goal is one-sided. Educators in the USA are to work toward international understanding on the part of *their* youth, but what provision is to be made for development of a reciprocal understanding in youth in other parts of the globe?

The language of the "International Education Act of 1966" offers some clarification:

The Congress hereby finds and declares that a knowledge of other countries is of the utmost importance in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between nations; that strong American educational resources are a necessary base for strengthening our relations with other countries; that this and future generations of Americans should be assured ample opportunity to develop to the fullest extent possible their intellectual capacities in all areas of knowledge pertaining to other countries, peoples, and cultures. . . .

In the Act *knowledge* is seen as *contributing* to understanding but, further, contributing to *cooperation* between nations. The 89th Congress recognized that an informed, cooperative relationship with other countries is essential. This body could not, however, legislate for citizens beyond its borders. No implementation could be suggested for the significant word *mutual*.

Understanding and Cooperation

If educators in this country are to be highly influential in bringing about a better world, they must go beyond past and current attempts at developing international understanding. These attempts are better seen as only part of a more inclusive operation. The broader task needing attention is cooperation with fellow educators in other nations to make education itself a strong force for improvement of living everywhere on this earth. Much is to be gained by accepting the challenge of working cooperatively on an international scale in education.

First, educators in the USA can continue to search for better ways to foster international understanding, but their efforts can be more fruitful if they do so in cooperation with educators from other lands. Educators from different nations can help one another to dispel misconceptions and get a more balanced view of their various histories, cultures, and values. Such exchange can point up unconscious biases, such as the penchant in the USA for talking in business terms ("I'll buy that idea") or in military terms ("a teaching strategy").

As educators in different parts of the world pool useful ideas for helping young people become more understanding of others, within as well as outside of their country, the youth of *many nations* should have a better chance of becoming more understanding of other people. Educators developing their ideas in cross-national groups have opportunity to see at first hand the value of an understanding which both results from and contributes to a productive relationship among people.

Second, educators of different nations may help one another to go beyond mere passive understanding and learn how to teach the skills of cooperation between persons and among nations essential for achieving a more peaceful world. To work with good will on such problems in cross-national groups, where differences in language and ways of attacking problems call for patient listening and careful examination of one another's assumptions, will increase the likelihood of new insights being produced and new skills cultivated on all sides. For example, it may be discovered quite early that, while certain officials are called inspectors in one country and supervisors or consultants in another, the bearer of any of these titles may work as an aid to teachers and children and have problems and experiences to share.

Third, by working cooperatively, educators of the world may make substantial progress on an important item on the world's agenda, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This article states that "*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality.*" Full development of human resources is necessary in order that individuals may lead rewarding lives and that their nation may mature socially, politically, and economically. There is no nation in the world that does not have much unfinished business on that score. No people can enjoy peace of mind or the security essential for creative individual and societal growth while a great many human beings in their own or other nations are "underdeveloped."

All nations have their form of the urban-suburban-rural problem, have their "underclass," have intergroup problems, have the problem of socialization of the younger generation. To help one another improve school systems in all nations to the point where persons are being helped to realize their true potential is to make a genuine contribution to the achievement of a peaceful world, a contribution most appropriate for the educator.

Fourth, the world's educators can even tackle the most difficult problem of all—how to maintain social and economic stability in a world without war.¹ If a lasting peace, including world disarmament, were to become a reality, what knowledge, attitudes, and skills would then be in strong demand for the world's young people? It is not too early for educators to begin to ponder such matters as they plan for full development of human resources.

What forms might cooperation take among educators on different continents? Surely, visitation in one another's countries by individuals and traveling groups and exchange teaching are to be continued and expanded. Also, periods of study abroad and attendance at various international conferences are to be encouraged. The *world* conference on education being planned for 1970 by the ASCD Commission on International Cooperation in Education is an attempt to take a giant step toward the formation of an international community of leaders in curriculum and instruction. Within such a community a number of cooperative projects can be promoted: cross-national research on common problems, development of materials that are fair to different people and useful in developing understanding and loyalty beyond national borders, and exchange of helpful ideas for improving curriculum and teaching.

Print, film, and satellite TV can be used to encourage educators of the world to think of themselves as belonging to one intellectual community, with common problems and a common technical language. This very issue of *Educational Leadership* is an attempt to take a small step in the direction of international collegueship in education through making accessible the thinking of educators in other nations and of educators in this country whose concern for education has a worldwide scope.

Only through cooperation with fellow educators in other nations will education all around the globe become the force it might be in building persons, communities, and a united world. But there can be no useful international cooperation among educators unless people approach the building of such a community in the spirit of peers intending to *commune* with and learn from one another. The pages that follow are a good place to begin.

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¹ A review in the *New York Times* of November 20, 1967, of *Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace*. L. Lewin, editor. New York: Dial Press. The reviewer, Eliot Fremont-Smith, states that the basic argument of the book is that "social stability is, and always has been, based on a war system."

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