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# Schooling for Peace and International Understanding

The use of schools as a political instrument has long been a highly developed art. Before widespread radio or travel, each nation could furnish through the schools the information available to most of its citizens and thereby further the interests of the State. Very often misinformation about others — particularly military, economic or cultural rivals — was added to a chauvinistic view of the motherland.<sup>1</sup> This kind of education let Hitler pervert one of the best schooled, most cultured and creative populations of Europe, reducing many of its citizens to the barbarians of Belsen or Auschwitz. One of the most insidious educational programs ever devised led this inhumanity to be confused with patriotism,<sup>2</sup> this schooling to be mistaken for education. It is important to remember that nationalistic schooling was augmented by the influence of press, radio, cinema, youth groups and demonstrations, and probably by bitter family memories of imposed treaties and economic privation.

Nuremberg introduced a new reason for attempting to school for humanity rather than for nationalism. The War Crimes trials recognized that all citizens are responsible for atrocities carried out at the order of their own leaders. Some commentators acknowledged “a shared responsibility for such horrible crimes even in an authoritarian state.”<sup>3</sup> Other writers pointed out that when collective responsibility could no longer be exercised at the polls, some type of conscientious objection to immoral orders was expected.<sup>4</sup> This implies that citizens should be given a reasonable opportunity to learn of international conventions of justice that they may be expected to uphold; there must be a substantial scholarly influence upon the schools, independent of direct government control;<sup>5</sup> selection and training of teachers and the preparation of the curriculum

must be similarly safeguarded from direct political manipulation; and the most rigorous of academic standards have to be retained.

A number of scholars such as Mannheim, Malinowski, Huxley, Ritchie, Dewey and Lauwerys, recognized that equation of learning and humanity was simplistic, since knowledge of other societies and their ideals might breed fear, envy or contempt rather than sympathy or respect.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless they refused to return to the skid because wheels sometimes ran crooked. They suggested more attention be given to the social sciences because theology and philosophy had been unsuccessful at reconciling differences.<sup>7</sup> These eminent scholars thereby defined the principal thrust for the educational efforts of UNESCO, suggested in the preamble of its charter: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."

### **UNESCO associated schools**

More recently, the quest for peace has been joined by a quest for a just global community — in particular, for a greater measure of health, education and opportunity for the poorer nations,<sup>8</sup> as well as much better assurances that future generations will not be unduly hampered by our plunder of the planet's resources or poisoning the biosphere.<sup>9</sup> But the global community is being devised in non-material ways also, and recent studies have emphasized the distress caused by cultural imperialism.<sup>10</sup> Thus, more attention to the means of ensuring the survival of a variety of cultural patterns and some chance of providing interaction between cultures has been suggested.<sup>11</sup> In effect, humanity stands at a point where the indentities of smaller societies can be extinguished quickly by the pervasiveness of particular cultural machinery (TV and automobiles, for example) or they can be preserved and become more influential by a shift in the purpose of quite similar hardware.

It is a long step between identifying such objectives for humanity and creating the environment where they are likely to develop. Governments must be persuaded, funds appropriated, persons trained and materials prepared. A thousand priorities must be renegotiated. UNESCO recognized that an agency in Paris with occasional meetings of representatives from member states was not sufficient for a task of this magnitude. Following a series of preliminary investigations, a decision was made in 1953 to encourage all member states to establish a number of experimental or demonstration schools,

which would be associated with one another and with UNESCO, and all pledged to the educational objective of promoting peace and international cooperation. They would try to implement the Charter's ringing preamble. Their quest would be aided by advice from the international scholarly community but would remain close to their own educational traditions so that their experience would be a useful model for others in their nations.<sup>13</sup>

By 1973, there were 926 Unesco Associated Schools in sixty-two countries.<sup>13</sup> They functioned in very different ways. For example, in Denmark, Japan and Poland where the Ministry of Education provided strong backing, Associated Schools influenced general educational practice. In Britain, India, Thailand and the USSR, Associated Schools were means of testing or demonstrating ideas, but were not closely linked to the practices of other schools. In fact some of their best ideas failed to percolate throughout the system or even to be well known in other schools. Usually costs or teacher shortages were largely to blame. A still more reluctant support has been extended by Canada and the United States, undermining the expectation that Associated Schools would have the maximum impact upon education in North America. Here, the personal commitment of a few persons and the support of the community have spelled the difference between success or failure.<sup>14</sup>

### **associated schools in canada**

The Canadian experience with UNESCO Associated Schools was delayed because the Federal Government approved the idea but had no educational capacity. Before 1962 when the Sèvres Conference reviewed the first decade of experience, the private attempts of a teacher from Oakwood Collegiate in Toronto constituted the only visible efforts in Canada. However, at the Sèvres conference, Canada was represented by the Canadian Education Association and subsequently A. E. Hobbs became a champion for a more active Canadian involvement. The constitutional questions were resolved by the creation of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO under the non-political umbrella of the Canada Council. In 1965, a part time field secretary identified interested schools in most provinces and, by 1973, there were forty Associated Schools in Canada.

In large measure they were autonomous, within the limits of the usual provincial regulations. However, a steady stream of UNESCO publications, occasional international visitors, an annual meeting of sponsors and a few students, and a growing

number of student-oriented international contacts provided some common ground.<sup>15</sup> The total contribution from UNESCO was some \$20,000 per year<sup>16</sup> but non-accounted local support resulted in a total program that would have cost several times that amount. Even so, the Associated Schools were more or less typical of their communities, with no more funding, staff time or resources than would be available to any ambitious staff. In fact, possibly the most effective international understanding or peace education programs in a Province have not been promoted by Associated Schools, nor have particular schools supported their programs consistently.

The kinds of activities undertaken by Associated Schools in Canada vary. There have been fund raising projects — especially those linked to international projects like the “Hundred Villages” community development program of Sri Lanka. There have been exchanges of class materials, letters, art, tapes, scrapbooks, and the like that force the students to look more critically at their own culture and to compare it with others. Occasionally student exchanges or work camps have been possible. Local applications of UNESCO themes have flourished in cultural festivals, ethnic studies, and environment analysis. There have also been bookish approaches where new materials and courses were devised to meet particular purposes suggested by UNESCO. Various teaching methods, including simulations, have tried to broaden students’ cultural perspectives.

Unfortunately there have never been any full scale systematic reviews of the effectiveness of Associated Schools in Canada. There are, however, a number of success indicators: the bouquets flung by visitors, the general approval of UNESCO officials, a certain pride of particular faculty, students and their communities, the occasional generous donation to further a program and the frequent appointment of Associated School staff to curriculum committees or policy boards. There have been failures as schools withdrew or staff sponsors resigned — usually because the expected support did not materialize and it seemed wrong to flaunt a meaningless label. Although a few dedicated and inspired leaders have achieved signal success within their community, they might well have done the same without the UNESCO identification.

Associated Schools remain largely unfamiliar to Canadians, but their international ideals are often approved in principle. While no provincial government or university has ever sponsored an Associated School, they do support parallel courses in their own systems. No real assessment of UNESCO should

ignore the restrained enthusiasm thus far extended to Associated Schools by provincial governments, school boards, education faculties or the professional associations. With few exceptions, these agencies have not adequately backed their local Associated Schools — the only teachers' association to endorse Associated Schools has been the Corporation des Enseignants du Québec — but they have pumped a number of ideas advocated by UNESCO into the broader educational system. However, since one of the objectives of Associated Schools was to accomplish this purpose, it could be argued that Canadian education has simply bypassed one step on the way to international understanding.

### references

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