



## Background: Our Context and How It Informs Our Conception of Internationalism/Interculturalism

Written by Mr. Hugh Burke, Headmaster (December 2016)

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**The school's Guiding Statements shall clearly demonstrate a commitment to internationalism/interculturalism in education, and this shall be reflected throughout the life of the institution.**

The first line of our Vision statement is: "*People are drawn to our school from around the world*". We are intentionally global, intentionally pan-national, and intentionally intercultural. We do not, however, identify our constituency by national groupings. We do not directly serve a transient population; we do serve an international Canadian population which seeks international and intercultural education in new ways.

The idea of defining internationalism and interculturalism is an interesting idea for us. We note that CIS does not define internationalism or interculturalism. This may reflect the fact that such definitions are essentially contested, and shift meaning within different national, cultural, social and economic contexts.

To some extent, this speaks to our potential response. We live in Canada, an officially multicultural country, one which is increasingly described as intercultural, and with a single national identity which is, in many ways, identified as a lack of strong single national identity. It may be captured as a polyphonous melange of multiple identities within a single chosen nationality.

We view nationality as an institutional capturing of one form of identity; claiming a pan-national status indicates that almost all our families identify as Canadian, while recognizing some 40 countries of origin. We also accept students from other countries who want to study here on a student visa, most of whom are in the process of becoming Canadian. Nationality also implies citizenship, with attached rights and obligations. Many of our families have some form of dual citizenship, yet almost all claim Canadian citizenship as dominant. It is more authentic in our school to speak of Canadians from different countries, rather than speaking about current nationality. Our students may identify with varying cultures, but their national identity is Canadian.

Our school is on the leading edge of that concept of Canadian interculturalism which draws from different nationalities of origin, and multiple cultures within those nationalities, as we move past multiculturalism to interculturalism. By interculturalism, we mean that there is a

central language and cultural mechanism, but within a lived experience of the celebration of difference and intentional learning from those differences. Put another way, we view ourselves as pan-cultural, with a population composed of Canadians from about 40 countries, of mixed ethnicity, race, religion, and cultural background. Our children speak over 20 different languages, are drawn from multiple religious groups (Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Taoist, atheist, Jewish...), and are ethnically highly diverse. Our school is an ongoing inquiry into the lived experience of interculturalism, and we view ourselves as constantly creating forms of new interculturalism as we develop. We do not define an end state, as we believe that “change is the only certainty”, and that we must continue to discover the many ways in which we can “learn to care for ourselves and for others”.

We have teachers from 17 countries, speaking 16 languages, with multiple teaching qualifications. Our alumni can be found throughout the world (e.g. Germany, Bali, China, USA, Mexico, France, Britain, and so on). Our students apply to, and gain admission to, universities in Canada, Britain, Ireland, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, and so on.

We recognize that students now live in an increasingly globalized world, and so must be prepared to work within multiple nationalities, in several languages, with great cultural sensitivity, and with the required knowledge, skills, and dispositions to live successfully and harmoniously around the globe.

We also believe that the only certainty is change, and that the ability to be successful in inquiry and problem-solving is a key to success in the future. With that understanding, we sought an appropriate global pedagogy and curriculum; we chose the International Baccalaureate and are now an International Baccalaureate Continuum school.

In choosing this International Baccalaureate curriculum, we have compared this education to the UNESCO document, *“Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission”*. This document seeks to define the attributes of learning for this century, and within a globalized world. They suggest four pillars of learning:

Education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

1. Learning to know, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.
2. Learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young peoples’ various social and work experiences which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work.

3. Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts - in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace.
4. Learning to be, so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person's potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.

Formal education systems tend to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning; but it is vital now to conceive education in a more encompassing fashion. Such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and to methods.

We contend that the IBO Continuum meets the criteria established in the UNESCO document, and that our Guiding Statements embody the principles of both. The IB Continuum curriculum allows our students recognition around the world for their education, enabling them to study and to live internationally.

The IB is known for its rigour, and programme graduates are now recognized as being very well prepared for university and higher-level education. Our graduates are multilingual, balanced, knowledgeable, thoughtful, principled, open-minded, caring and reflective. We call upon them to be risk-takers, and to base their work on inquiry.

That is, we embed the Learner Profile into our daily life, as we believe that these dispositions and abilities encapsulate the qualities needed for happiness and success around the world, and across time. These form the basis for our student reporting, and for our awards. They are the basis for selecting our Board members, and the basis for our teacher reporting.

The Learner Profile is the enactment of our Mission statement and captures the UNESCO principles fully. It requires depth of knowledge, a system of Approaches to Learning and Command terms, a well-rounded education, service learning, action in service, the development of personal capacities and dispositions, and a global understanding. We study other cultures, inquire into the immigrant experience, learn several languages, engage in online learning with people from other countries, and write international tests (CEM, IBO, and OECD).

In all of our programmes, we seek the highest in international standards. As one example, our Sexual Health programme is consistent with the principles articulated in the UNESCO document "*International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*". In another example, we have just completed the IBO initiative in the MYP on "*Building Quality Curriculum*" and received very positive feedback on an international scale. We continue to pursue

international excellence through ongoing inquiry. Inquiry is the basis of our pedagogy, and of our school development, and we live it fully. As our Vision makes clear, we “...engage with challenging and complex questions effectively and creatively” in our ongoing quest for a truly international and intercultural education.

Our informal and hidden curricula are also aligned with our curriculum-as-plan. We live an intercultural life in our school, and this may be exemplified with some anecdotal evidence. Our Library is collecting books in several languages. Our parents, working with the Library, are creating sets of books – in English – recorded by them – so that non-English speaking parents might be able to help their children to learn English, while at the same time supporting a maternal language.

We celebrate holidays and important days from multiple cultures, often driven by our parents. We have produced plays drawn from other cultures, and concerts using varied cultural sources of music. We engage in travel and service to multiple countries throughout the world (Spain, France, Ecuador, Costa Rica, USA, Belize, Japan, Vienna and Guatemala).

We have hesitated to identify our students by race, nationality, or culture, because our students themselves identify as intercultural, and do not see people of different races or heritage or nationality as some sort of “other”. We have worked with experts in the field of multiculturalism in our professional development and have come to see that everyone brings their own beliefs with them, and so mutual understanding is the basis upon which we proceed. We have parents who translate our newsletters for other parents, and who work with the school to bring families closer, families who are in the process of adapting to a new country.

As a lived experience, we believe that our school is international and intercultural. We do have a definition, but we find that definitions become limiting, and tend more to divide than to unite. In a Canadian and post-colonial outpost in Maple Ridge, we would prefer an ongoing and lived inquiry into what it means to be truly international and intercultural, congruent with our belief that change is the only constant, and that constant inquiry is the real measure of a school. In the end, we want to learn how to care for ourselves and others, and we want to “*learn to live well, with others and for others, in a just community*”.