



FOR SAIGON STAR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, Saturday, November 19, 2016, marked the ten-year anniversary of its inception. Having started life in a converted villa in the heart of District 1, the school now offers outstanding education to its pupils within a quiet residential area in District 2, having moved to a purpose-built facility in 2010.

For me, the celebrations raised thoughts of how much education has evolved during my teaching career thus far. Looking back over my time in education, two of the main changes I have seen are the addition of, and more value given to, ‘international mindedness’ and developing personal attitudes and dispositions that complement the academic learning children experience during their school lives. For me, the blend of all three provides learners with a far more balanced toolkit.

To understand why international mindedness is now such a vital ingredient of a modern curriculum, it is worth looking at some current trends in society.

Already, many more families now live and work away from their home countries. The rapid increase in international schools alone is a clear indicator of that. Currently, there are over 8,000 international schools worldwide, teaching over 4.3 million students, which, according to research from International School Consultancy, forecasts are expected to grow to 16,000 schools and 8.75 million students by 2026; this is due, in part, to the increasing numbers of international businesses and families living abroad.

Add to that the ongoing advances in technology, such as the further development of high-speed commercial flights and international travel is only likely to rise, people will travel

more, more businesses will develop international links, families will diversify and the whole world will become increasingly interdependent.

Even individuals who spend their entire lives living and working in their home towns are likely to have daily interactions with people from other countries, be it through work or in their home communities. Their lives will also be impacted upon in some way by choices made by others in other counties. Likewise, the choices they make in their own lives may well have implications for the lives of others around the world. Clearly then, the generation of today live in a very different world to that of a generation ago.

If education is about preparing children as well as possible for the world they live in, then it’s fair to say that education needs to constantly adapt and evolve, and to ensure that the children of today are provided with a toolbox

that fully prepares them for the world they live in, both now and in the future.

As such—and more than ever—it is essential for schoolchildren to acquire levels of knowledge and understanding beyond their own nationality. They also need the knowledge, skills, understanding and mindset to be global citizens.

Understandably, terms such as ‘global citizen’ may have been difficult for parents to comprehend in the recent past, and far easier to ignore, yet it is now increasingly relevant for parents to know and understand terms such as these so that they, too, can help to prepare their children to be active engaged participants in an interconnected world.

Fast forward another decade, when today’s 11-year-olds will be entering the jobs market, international mindedness will be an even more important factor than it is today. Interestingly, this is something that more and more

TEN YEARS OF EDUCATION

From humble beginnings to a truly international education

IMAGES BY VAN RAMBO



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parents seem to be aware of, judging by the kinds of questions parents now ask when enrolling at our school.

To summarize, international education is generally taken to include: respect and concern for other cultures and peoples; familiarity with international and global issues; and developing skills to work effectively in global or cross-cultural environments.

Compared to the uni-national primary school that I attended as a boy, I often think how fortunate the students I now teach are in that they are being educated alongside children from 20 other countries. For them, showing an interest in, and respect for, each other's nationalities occurs naturally, but that alone is not enough.

International mindedness is much more than simply knowing the names of different countries and their flags, that's just geography. In early education, children begin to learn about, and

are often fascinated by, the similarities and differences between each other's home countries. As they grow older, they are then guided to not only see the value of those similarities and differences but to think deeply about how the lives of people in one country or group might be affected by the activities of other countries or groups.

With the IPC (International Primary Curriculum) being the very forward-thinking curriculum that it is, 'International' is a subject in its own right, like geography or history, and many of its lessons are directly geared towards helping children practise and develop skills that will be useful to them in the future.

As an example, I recently taught a Year 7 class how bacteria evolve and can (sometimes) become resistant to medicines. We then looked into how these 'superbugs' can very quickly become a global issue, despite originating from a

single human being in a single country. After that, my Year 7 students were asked to identify possible solutions and how countries might work together to stop the spread of resistant bacteria while new forms of immunization are being developed. They then had their very own G8 summit meeting where their ideas were shared, all of which were thoughtful, co-operative and workable solutions for a real-life problem that was of great interest to and highly engaging for the students.

As well as being a good example of how the world has changed in recent decades, it also demonstrates why international mindedness is now essential to a modern-day curriculum. Moreover, it indicates that parents need to be mindful of making sure that their children receive a comprehensive education that will fully prepare and equip them for the world they live in, and even make a positive contribution to society. ■