

THE RICHMOND SCHOOL: A DISTINCTIVE EDUCATION

The Richmond School is quite distinct from many other schools in Colombia. What makes the Richmond School so special are the faculty, the facilities, and the pedagogy. These are the most important aspects of a school and make a huge difference with regard to the quality of the education which a child receives. Here at the Richmond School these aspects make us almost unique in Colombia. For example, fully 61% of the teachers are bilingual and more than 31% have had postgraduate studies. In addition, our Primary teachers are both specialists in their subject areas (Math and Science for example) and in the education of young children. This highly qualified faculty knows how to inspire and motivate their students.

In addition, the faculty has excellent resources to use. We have small classes (average size is 22) and large classrooms, so there is a lot of space in which to learn. In addition, our science teachers have 4 specialized laboratories (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and one for Pre-school/Primary). In addition we have two state of the art computer laboratories and 6 Art Rooms (two Music rooms, 2 Plastic Arts rooms, Dance, and Theatre).

More important is the way in which our faculty uses these resources. They use them for experiential learning through projects in the sciences and with computers. For example, during the first semester every student in Secondary will have to use technology in a class project. Our 11th grade students follow the Oxford University model in which students choose specialized tutorials on topics in which they are interested: Higher Mathematics, Diplomatic History, and Aesthetics and Literature. This gives them the opportunity to go into great depth in the subjects of their own choosing. This is one concrete way in which we put "independent learning" into practice.

All of this intellectual ferment occurs in a pastoral environment that is spacious, with large playing fields, and beautiful, with well designed gardens. Coupled with a warm and caring atmosphere, the Richmond School is a distinctive place to learn.

AN IDEA IN SEARCH OF A CONTEXT: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By
Ivan F. Mustain

In this new century, it has become very much a cliché to write about an increasingly interdependent world and the pressures of globalization. Indeed, aside from a few isolated regimes (North Korea and Myanmar spring immediately to mind), most nations are presently busily educating their youth to be competitive in the global marketplace. Usually, this means learning another language and applying international standards to evaluation and curriculum. For this reason, the International Baccalaureate and the International Primary Curriculum have spread widely throughout the world (14 schools in Colombia are IB). In addition, many schools, including some here in Colombia, are seeking international accreditation through the Council of International Schools (Gimnasio Fontana), the University of Massachusetts (Colegio Abraham Lincoln) or the European Quality Foundation (EQF). Yet, a truly international education demands more than an economic context, it requires, to be successful, analysis and debate over individual and societal values. This is because an international curriculum means examining academic subjects from different perspectives. The curriculum, therefore, must reflect not only an appreciation of multi-culturalism, but a welcoming of diverse opinions, races, religions and nationalities. This has positive benefits because it makes international education more motivating as it is relevant to the major issues facing young people today (the environment, war, racism), and also those issues involving values and ideas that have concerned philosophical and religious thinkers throughout history, regardless of nationality or culture. A truly international education gives students the skills and knowledge to confront and test their values and ideas against those from across time and distance. It also requires cooperation: sharing ideas and projects across the frontiers of culture, religion, and race. This is why students emerge from international education programs more proud of their nation, albeit with a full awareness of its weakness as well as its strengths.

This values context that international education implies is not fully appreciated. The inability of societies to reflect on their traditional values can have consequences that are just as serious as a lack of preparation for the global economy. In my country, the United States, our President and his supporters dispute the values of welcoming diverse opinions and of international cooperation in both their rhetoric and their policies. The result of this attitude, as Fred Kaplen wrote in Slate .com on Oct. 31, 2006 is:

"...their blithe disregard of expertise (military, economic, and otherwise), their harrumphing unilateralism, their exaggerated assumptions about American power, their dismissal of negotiations as a game for weaklings (and negotiations with bad guys as appeasement). The world is awash in the consequences, not least in the regions around the "axis of evil," where the administration has tried most intensely to hoist its ideas onto reality.

Thus, international education has a broader context and more implications than are apparent at first. The advantages are, in my opinion, quite clear. Yet, before such an approach is embarked upon, educational leaders need to be aware of two important conditions: firstly, that international education will not support a narrowly nationalistic or ideological national agenda (e.g. Bush's USA, Castro's Cuba or Chavez's Venezuela) and secondly, difficult choices have to be made about what is taught and what is not. National curriculums that spread themselves broadly amongst many subjects and topics (e.g. Colombia) need to be reduced in breadth to provide the opportunity for in-depth exploration, guided study, and synthesis of different cultures and nations. These hard decisions are the challenges which we educators need to address in preparing our young men and women for the 21st. century .

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EDUCATION AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

By
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In recent years, educators all over the world have been confronted by a controversy regarding the role of the school in educating students about values. Many parents believe that they alone have the authority and the right to provide guidance to their children regarding values. In a sense, educators have no argument with these parents as they are the primary model for implanting values in their children. During their formative years, children are closely observing not only what their parents say, but, even more importantly, what they do. By the time a child enters school, many of their attitudes about values have already been formed. Thus, the influence of schools is quite minimal compared to the influence of parents.

Nonetheless, many we at the Richmond School do believe that schools can play a role in implanting values in children, particularly in Secondary School. It is during these years (grades 5-12) that children begin to question the values and ethics of their parents and to seek their own identities. We at the Richmond School can help this search in two important ways. One way is to provide students with the intellectual skills to think clearly and properly about values and ethics. This is done in general terms Math and Science classes (where students are taught to think logically and rationally) and more specifically in Philosophy, History and Literature courses which examine specific ethical issues and dilemmas.

However, while the intellectual development of ethical skills and attitudes is critical, there is also another important way in which schools can contribute to student values. This is through Experiential Education. This is a method of education in which students learn from direct experience in a challenging environment. It usually takes place outside of the school, so that students can have their values exposed to a "real world" experience. At the Richmond School we approach Experiential Education from two directions. The first is through our Religion and Values course. This course is centered in the classrooms from grades 1-4. However, when students reach the fifth grade, we feel that spirituality and values need to be tested and shared. Thus, we have arranged for our students to visit a District School to work and to play with the less privileged children there. Thus, through service to others our students develop their values and, hopefully, a fuller sense of spirituality. In addition, with help from the Richmond Foundation, we are developing a Wilderness program which allows students to test themselves on rock-climbing or hiking trips. In such situations, students are closer to nature and can interact more freely with each other and their teachers. This year, for example, the Secondary School has arranged for each class, beginning in the 4th grade to undertake a Wilderness Experiential Educational experience. The purpose of these trips is to provide students with an adventurous experience that will stimulate them to discuss ethical issues, enable them to work as teams and build their leadership skills. This might seem overly ambitious, but as schools in Colombia and around the world can attest: it works. We are looking forward to seeing the results here at the Richmond School.