



Citation for published version:

Savvides, N & Bunnell, T 2022, 'The 'internationalist' educational approach in practice: Insights from a United World Colleges 'Short Course'', Paper presented at British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference 2022, Liverpool, UK United Kingdom, 6/09/22 - 6/09/22.

Publication date:
2022

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Publisher Rights
Unspecified

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

The ‘internationalist’ educational approach in practice: Insights from a United World Colleges ‘Short Course’

Nicola Savvides and Tristan Bunnell (University of Bath)

Paper presented at British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference,
University of Liverpool, 6th September 2022

It is well-established (Peterson, 1972) that the field of private K-12 English-speaking international schooling involves a broad spectrum of educational approach. What was once simply visualized (Matthews, 1989) as a division, or dichotomy, between the ‘ideologically-led’ and the ‘market-led’ has been re-conceptualized within the last two decades within a broader globalization lens. The body of 12,000 (Stacey, 2020) schools worldwide (according to England-based market research by ISC Research) that are delivering a curriculum in English largely outside an English-speaking nation can now be better conceptualized as covering a spectrum where the values-driven ‘internationalist’ approach acts as a minority one, dominated by the skills-based ‘globalist’ approach (Cambridge and Thompson, 2004).

The recent huge growth of the latter approach, driven largely by a newly emergent middle class (perhaps representing a ‘Global Middle Class’) and national policy-making enabling the growth in supply of ‘international schools’, has led to China emerging as having the most schools and Dubai having the most children of any nation globally. We have witnessed a ‘gold rush’ in Asia (Machin, 2017), leading to much discussion about the changing landscape.

At the same time, the ‘internationalist’ approach stands largely ignored and under-reported. We report in our session on a study undertaken in the arena of the United World Colleges (UWCs), numbering 19 residential schools and colleges across four Continents educating 15,000 children each year, deliberately selected globally by a unique system of 150 national committees, made up of 6,000 volunteers. The UWC website (uwc.org) states that: ‘Each school has its own unique location and character and is dedicated to nurturing young people’s energy and idealism into empathy, responsibility and lifelong action.’ Although each UWC is unique, there are seven ‘common aims’ centred around promoting intercultural understanding amongst diverse individuals, genuine concern for others, community interaction, and positive action. Students are encouraged to take responsibility, and to manage risks. Ultimately, the aim is to give young people ‘the confidence to spark change’, and to show them ‘that change is possible, and that they can make it happen’.

Beginning with Atlantic College in south Wales in 1962, they ‘remain a model of ideology-driven international education’ (Tsumagari, 2010 p.291). Cambridge and Thompson (2004 p.164) identified the UWCs as ‘a cadre of ideologically internationalist institutions,’ and they have since been described as a ‘radically progressive educational movement’ (Van Oord and Corn, 2018 p.60). Satok (2014) had identified four areas central to the UWC’s mission: these are ‘intercultural exchange’; ‘national identity’; ‘global issues’; and ‘peace building’. However, surprisingly, in-spite of 60 years of existence, the UWCs have attracted relatively

little research inquiry. We know little about the long-term effects of such an ‘internationalist’ schooling experience.

Perez (2016 p.7) describes the UWC as ‘an incredibly strong unit of analysis to study mission, organization, and outcomes.’ In fact, in practice, the UWCs offer two sets of possible experiences. Alongside the usual two-year ‘Long Courses’, involving the delivery of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, the UWCs each year offer a large number of two-week long ‘Short Courses’. We report in our session on the activities and events of one ‘Short Course’, delivered to 50 young people in Northern Europe in 2019 (one of 25 offered that year).

We were able to explore, for the first time, the ‘UWC Short Course’ and its potential to transform and build character. We will present in our session five vignettes of participants’ experiences to reveal their perspectives of a ‘Short Course’. By utilizing the work of American sociologist Randall Collins and his *Interaction Ritual Chain Theory* (Collins, 2014), we will show how the every-day rhythm and interactions of the rituals of the course, in small groups, coupled with an intentionally deeply emotional experience, might be used to transform young people and empower them with the positive emotional energy that they need to ‘spark change’ in the future. Our paper builds upon a published work (Savvides and Bunnell, 2022). By (re)visiting the ‘internationalist’ approach to international education, we can begin to offer insights and suggestions into how the growth of elite international schooling more generally might be critically engaged with and understood.

References

Cambridge, J., & Thompson, J. (2004) Internationalism and globalization as contexts for international education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 34(2), 161-175.

Collins, R. (2014) Interaction ritual chains and collective effervescence, in: *Collective Emotions*, Christian von Scheve and Mikko Salmela (Eds). Pp.299-311. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Machin, D. (2017) The great Asian international school gold rush: An economic analysis, *Journal of Research in International Education* 16(2), 131-146

Matthews, M. (1989) The scale of international education: part 1, *International Schools Journal* 17(1), 7-17.

Perez, A. B. (2015) *Mission Operationalization and Alignment: The Case of The United World Colleges*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, The Claremont Graduate University.

Peterson, A. (1972) *The International Baccalaureate: An Experiment in International Education*. London: George G. Harper & Co. Ltd.

Satok, A. (2014) *Education as a Force for Change; An Analysis of the UWC Movement*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Princeton University.

Savvides, N., & Bunnell, T. (2022). The United World College movement in practice: the role of interaction rituals in releasing positive emotional energy to ‘spark change’. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*.

Stacey, V. (2020, October 13) International School market sees continued expansion in 2020, *thepienews.com*

Tsumagari, M. (2010) The enduring effects of a United World College education as seen through a graduate's eyes. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 9(3), 289-305.

van Oord, L. and Corn K. (2013) Learning how to 'swallow the world': Engaging with human difference in culturally diverse classrooms. *Journal of Research in International Education*. 12(1), 22-32.