

Impact: The Challenge of Defining and Measuring Impact

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Sir John Daniel – Chair: International Board

In the 50 years since Atlantic College was founded, the educational world has flattered UWC by imitating us. IB programmes now reach one million students; schools in my home city of Vancouver are almost as diverse in ethnic and linguistic make-up as a UWC and everyone seems to be doing community service.

So our challenge, with our teachers in the forefront, is to stay ahead, to continue to be the pioneers of international education, to be sharper than any other organisation in defining what the outcomes of an international education should be and how to attain that impact.

It comes down to being explicit about the aims we want to achieve and not leaving the means of their achievement to chance. For example, I am impressed by what Atlantic College is doing to bring what are usually called extra-curricular activities into the mainstream organisational structures of the Colleges so that no one can regard them as subsidiary or secondary.

This edition of United World concentrates on impact. We would like to think that UWC has an impact on students that lasts a lifetime. We try to track the achievements of our alumni and take great pride in them. But we can hardly wait 40 years to decide whether UWCs helped their students to lead good lives before adjusting our aim.

So we tend to focus on what happens immediately after students leave us and attach perhaps too much importance to where they go to university. I hope that we can get better at tracking what happens to them after that.

Many of our students from poor countries secure places at universities in rich countries, which is fine, but what happens five and ten years later? Is the key impact of the UWCs to accelerate the brain drain of talent from poor to rich countries and, if so, are we content with that?

I have spent the past 12 years in international educational development, and while I accept that some brain circulation is a good thing, I would be ashamed to chair an organisation whose overall impact is to strip developing countries of their most talented youngsters.

In my previous contacts with UWC I was relatively unaware of the scope of the national committees, this remarkable aspect of our organisation that gives us a tremendous global footprint. How do National Committees measure their impact? Presumably their first requirement is to satisfy the requests from the colleges for students from their countries. But who are these students?

Most countries are made up of diverse ethnicities and religions. Ensuring that the youngsters sent to UWC reflect this is not straightforward. Even less straightforward is to address the main problem of our age, which is the growing gap between rich and poor. How do you find youngsters living in poverty who, despite the inevitable shortcomings of their early education, have the potential to make it at a UWC?

It can be done. When I visited Mahindra College some years ago, the Head pointed out a resource-poor village at the bottom of the hill that the College had adopted in a spirit of development. My most moving moment at last year's Board meeting at UWC USA was to meet a girl from that village who had just started as a student and to all appearances was doing well.

I was especially proud to learn that, although the UWCs are now only a tiny proportion of the 3,500 IB schools, we play a disproportionate role in its development because of the numbers of our teachers who act as examiners, workshop leaders, curriculum developers and so on. Jeffrey Beard, the Director-General, remarked that the IB thinks of the UWC as its research and development arm, citing the new course in Global Politics as an example of an initiative that came from us.

I have two UWC alumni in my own family, which makes me realise that it is impossible to generalise about them. In my short time in this role I have noticed that heads and others often speak of alumni as a problem. They are not being negative. What they mean is that although alumni are eager to help, schools do not know how to best channel their energies.

Finally, I hope that UWC will examine the opportunities for growth and impact offered by going online. Today's students like and expect to study online and the IB and its partner Pamoja have invested \$10 million in putting a dozen of the Diploma courses online to high standards of quality. However, the IBO has stated that it will not compete with its schools by becoming a global online high school. The online courses are there for the existing IB schools to use.

Might one of our more dynamic UWCs seize this opportunity of offering the UWC experience globally at scale? Within a few years there will be various global online high schools enrolling tens of thousands of students. Might one of them carry the spirit and the impact of the UWC movement to a world thirsty for education for peace?

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