

Chapter 2

Benefits and Trends in International Education



“It is time we realized that, wherever we are, whatever our line of work, we are affected by nearly everything else that’s happening in the world. Students who leave school without some grounding in international education may turn out to be the new disadvantaged.”

Marx 2006, p. 56

Globalization has transformed our world. Simply put, what happens on one side of the world affects the other side of the world, and while links between countries have existed for centuries, never before has change in one part of the world affected another so greatly and with such immediacy.

The increasing number of players and factors influencing national policy and the overall state of the planet mean that national and global issues demand increasing collaboration between countries and amongst individuals, community organizations, governments, businesses and academic institutions. International education provides students with the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to function effectively in this interdependent global context.¹ It also generates academic, social, cultural, political and economic benefits that extend well beyond the students themselves.



Skills and Attributes

Broadly speaking, international education programs and initiatives develop the following skills and attributes:

- critical, creative and complex thinking
- problem solving
- information gathering and synthesis
- communication and diplomacy
- practical application of knowledge
- self-reflection and self-evaluation
- curiosity and enthusiasm for learning
- independence
- a sense of personal identity
- self-confidence
- a sense of responsibility to the world
- the ability to understand, relate to and communicate with people of other cultures.



Academic Benefits

Because most international education programs are interactive and experiential, they create learning environments that engage students in learning and promote the practical and personal application of knowledge.

International programs and initiatives:

- enable students to build unconventional friendships, which become foundations for information sharing and collaboration
- support inquiry-based and cross-curricular learning
- allow language learners and teachers to practise their language skills with native speakers
- enable students and educators to access primary sources of information about other parts of the world
- enrich Alberta programs of study by bringing new perspectives and unique personal experiences into the classroom.



Social and Cultural Benefits

International education strengthens the social and cultural fabric of Alberta by providing school communities with the opportunity to develop personal relationships with students and educators from other places. It also combats cultural stereotypes, encourages appreciation for cultural differences and develops the intercultural communication skills of all involved which, ultimately, enhances the quality of life of all Albertans.²

International education programs and initiatives:

- demystify other cultures³
- support the integration of immigrant students and educators
- involve parents and the larger community in student learning; e.g., as host families, invitees to international celebrations in the school⁴
- encourage citizen engagement in global issues.

Political Benefits

International education is an important part of foreign policy, creating geopolitical ties upon which provincial and national governments may build.⁵

International education programs and initiatives:

- create awareness about Alberta and Canada internationally, which in turn results in greater Canadian influence in the international arena
- contribute to a citizenry that is informed about different regions of the world and that understands global issues and local implications⁶
- ensure that today's students and tomorrow's leaders develop the communication and diplomacy skills they will need to build and sustain international relationships
- break down mistrust between countries by developing trust between individuals.⁷

Economic Benefits

International education contributes to Alberta's economy and labour force in a number of direct and indirect ways.



International education programs and initiatives:

- give students the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to pursue an international career
- create workers who can communicate in multiple languages and negotiate cultural boundaries, thereby supporting local industries that involve international trade or cross-border partnerships
- promote Alberta internationally, encouraging an increase in immigration, tourism and international business ventures in the province
- attract international students, whose tuition fees, living expenses and personal spending contribute approximately \$20,000–\$30,000 (per student) to the local economy in which they live.⁸

Responding to Trends and Impacts of Globalization

A long-time supervisor of international programs at Edmonton School District No. 7, Ann Calverley, has described internationalization as “an earthquake” and with good reason. Just as an earthquake has the potential to significantly alter a landscape, internationalization has the potential to significantly alter a student’s or educator’s worldview. The effects of an earthquake are often felt throughout the region; the same is true for internationalization. An earthquake is the adjustment of the earth to significant pressure. Globalization has created some new points of pressure as well as new spaces of opportunity within the school system. School authorities that internationalize will be able to adjust to these pressures and leverage these opportunities with relative ease. The following chart highlights some key trends, identifies their impact on education in Alberta, and explains how school authorities that internationalize are better able to respond to these trends.

In 1999, the Conference Board of Canada released a study noting the connection between international education and various economic indicators. Some highlights of this study include the following.

- In countries where students study abroad and then return to their home country, there is a marked increase in national income.
- Countries involved in international education tend to be more involved in the trade of technology and technological patents (likely due to the knowledge exchange and development of cross-border partnerships).
- Countries involved in international education “improve their standing as trading nations faster than their counterparts that are less involved” and, therefore, tend to benefit from increasing rates of international trade (p. 20).
- Participants in international education programs serve as ambassadors and promote their home country while abroad, resulting in greater foreign direct investment in their home country.

In 2009, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Canada released a study, *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada*. Some highlights of this study include the following.

- International students contributed more than \$6.5 billion to the Canadian economy in 2008.
- In employment, international education services provided 64 940 jobs in Canada.
- The number of international students in Canada has more than doubled since 1998 to 178 000.
- Their presence provided employment for over 83 000 Canadians last year.

Key Trends	Impact on Education in Alberta	School authorities with international education will be better able to:
Increasing immigration to Alberta	An increasing number of students from different cultural backgrounds, many with a first language other than English or French, are enrolling in Alberta schools and will require extra support. There is also an increased possibility of culture-based conflict among students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support new Canadians, permanent residents and temporary residents as they transition to Alberta • provide students, teachers, administrators and school authority staff with the intercultural communication skills they need to build positive relationships • celebrate diversity and the innovative thinking that comes from multiple perspectives and approaches
Increasing travel abroad	More students, teachers, administrators and school authority staff will travel or plan on travelling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage travel to be a meaningful learning experience • draw on the skills and experiences of travellers to develop strategic partnerships abroad
Alberta's integration into the global economy	Alberta students and their families will be influenced by the dynamics of the global marketplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help students understand the dynamics of a global economy • prepare students to work with international clients or partners and, in some cases, to work and live abroad
Increasing urgency to protect and sustain the planet	More students, staff and citizens will seek ways to become environmentally conscious and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage the examination of environmental issues in a global context • involve students in social action activities on the environment and related issues like global poverty and international conflict
Pervasive use of information technologies	Information technologies will continue to expand learning communities and provide even greater access to information from around the globe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expand learning communities to include students, teachers and content experts from other countries • contextualize news and events from other countries, helping students to understand the world around them • teach students about safe and responsible Internet use

Increasing Immigration to Alberta

According to Statistics Canada, Canada has the greatest net international migration (as a proportion of population growth) among all G-8 countries.⁹ Immigration to Canada has increased from 3.9 million (or 15.6% of the population) in 1986 to 6.2 million (or 19.8% of the population) in 2006. By 2017, 22% of the Canadian population, or roughly 1 in 5 Canadians, is expected to be foreign born.¹⁰



More newcomers are immigrating to Alberta than ever before.¹¹

The percentage of Canadian immigrants who settled in Alberta grew from 5.9% in 1997 to 8.8% in 2007.¹²

Many of these increases are in Alberta's largest cities; according to the 2006 Census, 5.2% of immigrants to Canada chose to live in Calgary and 2.9% in Edmonton. However, the number of immigrants (as a percentage of the population) either remained steady or increased in almost every region of the province.¹³ The above statistics do not include temporary residents and, therefore, likely underestimate the extent to which immigration is transforming Alberta communities and schools.

Many immigrants to Alberta have children, and our schools are increasingly diverse as a result. Creating cohesion within schools requires that newcomer students are well supported in their transition to Alberta, and that Alberta students and educators have the skills and attributes to accept and communicate with people of other cultures. English or French as a second language programs and intercultural and diversity training will be essential. Schools that already engage in internationalization will be well equipped to provide these supports.

Increasing Travel Abroad

In 2007, 903 million people travelled internationally for pleasure; in 2010, this number is expected to reach 1 billion.¹⁴ The world is on the move and so are Canadians. According to Statistics Canada, 7.4 million overseas trips were taken by Canadians in 2007, up 9.9% from the previous year.¹⁵

While factors such as rising fuel costs, communicable diseases and airplane safety may affect international travel in the future, many Alberta students will likely engage in some form of international travel during their lifetime. School authorities with international education programs will be better equipped to help students understand travel as a learning experience. These school authorities will also be able to draw on the expertise and relationships of teachers and other staff who have travelled abroad to form strategic educational partnerships.

Alberta's Integration into the Global Economy

Alberta's economy has become increasingly integrated into global markets. Between 1998 and 2008, Alberta exports grew approximately 250%¹⁶ and in 2007, Alberta exported \$90.4 billion dollars of goods to over 192 countries, predominantly the United States, Japan, Mexico and the Netherlands.¹⁷ Such economic integration means that Alberta's economy is sensitive to both positive and negative changes in the global economy; for example, in the first quarter of 2009, Alberta's international good exports were worth 30.3% less than they were in the same quarter of 2008, due largely or entirely to the global economic downturn.¹⁸



Schools play a critical role in shaping future citizens. Today's students will be tomorrow's leaders; these students must understand the dynamics of the global economy in order to guide Alberta through the changing economic landscape. School authorities that are engaged in internationalization are well positioned to teach students about global interdependency, economic or otherwise.

Increasing Urgency to Protect and Sustain the Planet

Numerous studies are available about the current state of the planet. Most highlight the progressive deterioration of the environment and encourage citizens, governments and industries to do more to protect and sustain our planet. For example, in 2005, 1300 authors from over 95 countries were brought together to conduct the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment or "the most comprehensive analysis ever conducted of how the world's oceans, dry lands, forests and species interact and depend on one another."¹⁹ It found that "human actions are depleting the Earth's natural capital, putting such strain on the environment that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted."²⁰

"The unavoidable conclusion is that our personal security depends on the security of our planet. We are past the point that any one group, wherever it is, can survive only at the expense of others ... We're all in this together. We have nowhere else to go. Optimistically, our common threats may be well disguised common opportunities."

Marx 2006, pp. 219–220

Increasing stress on the natural environment has serious implications for national and personal security as well. At current rates, the world population is expected to grow to 9 billion people by 2050, which means that more people will need access to natural resources.²¹ At the same time, life-sustaining resources, such as fresh water, are becoming increasingly scarce. Many experts predict future conflict over access to these resources.²²

This is the world in which Alberta students are growing up and these are the issues that they will contend with as adults. By highlighting interdependency and global issues, school authorities can encourage students to think bigger and to consider how they affect and are affected by people in other countries. By supporting international clubs and projects, school authorities can also create an arena for students to get involved, to learn about an issue, to take a stand and to do something about it.

Pervasive Use of Information Technology

The widespread use of information technology is changing how we interact with others and how we learn. The traditional concept of geographically based learning communities is being stretched to include virtual and online learning communities made up of students, teachers and content experts from around the world.²³ Cell phones and various Internet media, such as chat rooms and social networking sites, allow us to connect instantly with people in other parts of the globe. The rapid transmission of and widespread access to information means that we can follow events occurring in other countries as they unfold. Information technology presents a multitude of possibilities for international education.

However, the pervasive use of information technology also raises concerns. For example, some argue that immediate and universal access to information means that youth are more exposed to potentially inappropriate coverage of horrific international events, such as the Columbine shooting.²⁴ In addition, online chat rooms and social networking sites present a number of privacy and personal security concerns.

International education initiatives can help teachers transform these concerns into teachable moments. For example, teachers can help students make sense of what they see on television or the Internet by encouraging them to research and discuss current global issues. While preparing their students to e-mail or “chat” with international partners, teachers can explore the topic of safe and appropriate online communication. School authorities that engage in internationalization will be able to capitalize on the learning opportunities that information technology presents while giving students the tools to enrich and protect themselves.

Conclusion

International education programs and initiatives are considered by many to be interesting but extraneous. As this chapter has highlighted, internationalization is not only beneficial but arguably imperative. Putting learning in a global context has never been more appropriate or more necessary.

Endnotes

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