

Resource 25: Absolutes

'The world community that we must develop will never come into being or operate successfully unless the bulk of the people feel themselves to be members of a world community, that is unless they develop a sense of world citizenship. This is clearly the biggest educational task of all.' (Edwin O Reischauer, former US ambassador to Japan and Professor of Harvard University)

With the above challenge before education, there's a need to come off the fence in terms of international mindedness.

By looking at the behavior of some prominent people in the past, you could attribute international mindedness in all sorts of ways. For example, Lenin in his drive to argue the case for world revolution might be seen as internationally minded. He clearly had a view that challenged the capitalist system and imperialism of his time.

We set up earlier a list of possible examples of internationally minded individuals: the Red Cross worker, the UN worker (civil servant), the UN soldier, the Peace keeper, the soldier in a just war and the international businessman. Some of you would rightly question some of those included in this list. What we are doing is applying a value system and making a judgment. When we try to bring about international mindedness in students we have, either explicitly or implicitly, a set of values that we wish to develop. There is a danger we think in moving to a position of 'anything goes'. This may not be acceptable and certainly would not lead to a common position of what is an internationally-minded person.

We've asked you to think of skills and values that come together to make the attribute of international mindedness. We consider a rather relativist position to be something not acceptable and consequently do peddle a set of values that we consider to be fundamental to international mindedness. There are in essence some categorical imperatives as we consider that there are some universal values that are desirable. By being universal, they cross cultures, religions and become the roots that make humanness or the human condition. As Reischauer suggests, we all should feel part of the same community, a world community because we are world citizens who adhere to common values.

These values rest on open mindedness, rational thought, critical thinking and questioning, empathy, an appreciation, understanding and acceptance of diversity and a striving to improve the condition of humans within the world. That drive to improvement needs to be tempered by compassion, understanding and a respect for the individual and a desire for peace, so that betterment does not come about at the expense of a few. It may mean that we will disturb the current distribution of wealth and resources in the world – if that's the case, so be it.

Having dared to put forward something of an absolute, it's inevitable that some will challenge the position. That acceptance of difference is part of the process, but those who strive to produce international mindedness have implicitly, we think, made a commitment to celebrate differences and push to improve the human condition.