

International comparisons

A WORLD CLASS REVIEW

Our politicians and their advisers tell us we must emulate those countries whose students outperform ours in international achievement surveys like PISA and TIMSS. That is, we must copy their policies (well, those policies that fit, or can be bent to fit, our own) in the expectation that standards will thereby rise. Meanwhile, other countries no less exercised by standards are prepared to be more discriminating when in turn they seek to learn from the UK.

Where do they look? To the Cambridge Primary Review. Our latest figures show that to date the CPR's website has been accessed in 146 - three quarters - of the world's 196 countries, and in many countries the use of CPR material is substantial, sustained and systematic. The latter list is headed by the United States, followed by Australia, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Japan, Germany, India, New Zealand and Indonesia. If we put these findings together with what emerges from our direct international contacts and our monitoring of the world's media, we find that what seems to unite an increasing number of people worldwide is a desire to redress the balance of curriculum, assessment and educational values to the extent that these have been distorted by over-hasty and ill-informed reaction to the same international achievement surveys.

So on the one hand we witness the moral panic induced by the PISA/TIMSS league tables, with governments scurrying for 'tough' measures like targets, high stakes testing, the marketisation of schooling and a curriculum reduced to the 'basics'. On the other hand, there's a deepening recognition that such recipes may have claimed rather too much for themselves by way of efficacy, especially in England and the United States, that the evidence from Scandinavia and south-east Asia may have been misread or misused, and that in the process too much that is of fundamental educational importance to our children may have been sacrificed: breadth and richness in the curriculum, assessment for learning as well as accountability, interdependence and reciprocity as well as competition, learning for engagement and inspiration as well as for test results ...

If the Cambridge Primary Review's wealth of evidence, argument and ideas gives heart to our international colleagues, then we are delighted. Here in the UK the CPR's following is considerable and expanding, and we are hard-pressed to keep up with the requests for information, speaking invitations, expressions of goodwill, shared ideas and offers of collaboration that we receive. Yet we'd be even more delighted if that figure of 75 per cent and rising were to denote the number of British primary schools in which *Children, their World, their Education* is read, pondered and

discussed; or the number of political advisers whose knowledge of international evidence isn't restricted to PISA; or the number of Westminster MPs who see it as their obligation to engage in educational debate properly informed.

As we start the CPR's seventh year and the CPR network's third, we can but hope ...

Robin Alexander