

2006 Goldman Sachs Prizes for Excellence in International Education

Washington International School *Elementary/Middle School Prize Winner*

Asia Society, in partnership with the Goldman Sachs Foundation, recognizes outstanding schools, states, high school students, and media and technology organizations through the Prizes for Excellence in International Education. The Elementary/Middle School Prize recognizes an elementary or middle school that is outstanding in engaging its students in learning about other world regions, cultures, and languages.

The 2006 recipient of this prize is the Washington International School in Washington, D.C. I am speaking with Richard Hall and Kate Meenan-Waugh.

Q: Congratulations on winning a 2006 Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education. Tell us, what led to the creation of the Washington International School?

Richard: The founder of the school is a woman by the name of Dorothy Goodman who is still very active in various international organizations today. She founded the school in 1966 and her idea was, after the war, she saw that there were many ways in which people needed to learn how to relate to one another and how education ought to be fostering exactly that goal. At the same time, she was most interested in foreign languages and that's the genesis behind the Washington International School's dual language programs.

Q: What kind of a graduate are you seeking to create? How would a graduate of your school differ from the graduate of a typical American school?

Richard: That's an easy question to answer because the board set up a mission statement several years ago which is very close to the mission statement that the school has always had. And that is as follows: The mission of Washington International School is to provide a demanding international education that will challenge students to be responsible and effective world citizens. And we spend a great deal of time talking about what international means, what effective means, and what responsible means in terms of what we want our graduates to become.

Kate: We want our graduates to internalize the idea that they have a responsibility to be understanding of other people, to communicate with other people in a way that's understandable by all, to take on a second language, to do work within a community that brings people together. We just recently had our graduation where one of our graduates said, "I want to thank the school for allowing me to grow up with people from so many different places because I know this is what I will going to be doing for the rest of my life, working and living with people from all over the world with different cultures." And I think, as an institution, everything we do goes back to that mission.

Q: So how do you get international content into the core curriculum of the school?

Kate: Well I think it's easy when you sit down with your professionals, your teachers, who have the education in a particular discipline and look at how can you make sense of world history, how can you make sense something like mathematics, and see it in a way that can be seen by peoples all over the place. For example, math, I mean people don't necessarily think of math and something international, but tomorrow we are celebrating our Asia day in the 6th grade, and one of the activities that students will engage in is Rangoli, which is making geometric patterns using mathematical principals. They'll play with and learn how to use abacuses. Africa Day, they're using math in various different exercises. So it's taking something that seems to be very sort of inward looking and making people realize that throughout history and in a contemporary way, this is something that everybody uses.

Q: I know that the Washington International School has an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program. Can you explain what that is?

Kate: Well it is a inquiry-based program, it's actually a framework curriculum, and like all the other International Baccalaureate organization programs, it provides us a structure by which we can take our own mission of what education should be for our children, create curriculum that works. It has five what are known as areas of interaction and throughout the five year program – that is the middle years program – we are challenging the students to integrate what they learn and use these five areas to make sense of what they see around them. The areas are the environment, health and social education, community service, *homo faber* (or man maker), one of the more controversial terms, and ultimately it all begins with approaches to learning, it's teaching students how to become life long learners, and how to constantly look at the world as a place where they can learn or where they can serve or where they can help.

Richard: I might also say that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years program is preceded by a primary years program which is somewhat the same kind of structure for teaching where the teachers themselves work out what the content is, and therefore if the teachers are internationally oriented, the content will end up being internationally oriented. And then it is followed by the diploma program which is the end of the high school years, and we have students who have just completed all of those examinations and have graduated and are done.

Q: What do you do if you don't have internationally oriented teachers? If you're a school in the middle of the United States and you want to pursue this, how do you get your math teachers to know this?

Kate: I think professional development is crucial and I think any school that wants to internationalize more first has to look at its foundation, its mission statement. It has to create a mission or have a group of people who want to do this. And then once you have that mission in place, you train your teachers, you send your teachers out to training sessions, you send them out on trips. For example, one of the things that we do and we feel strongly about is that our faculty, they may be international, but you have to keep

that freshness in that international perspective. So we're just starting as part of our faculty benefit, for example, sending our teachers out once every five years to do something interesting in an international context. Something beyond visiting to the south of France or going to Rome, but something really where you're engaging in either a professional development project, or some other class or course, that sort of freshens that outlook because anyone can become stale at what they do. So we are committed to doing that. And for a school that wants to become more international, you have to get your people out there, you have to get them in programs where they can experience living abroad and seeing what that's like.

Richard: And it's been extremely interesting to see how schools across the country, independent schools across the country, have taken these ideas and have moved forward with them. It clearly is an idea whose time has come. And schools are involved in all sorts of programs through professional development. And what's happened is that schools all over the country have been leaguings with schools abroad, state schools as well as international schools abroad, to do projects. And for instance, what we did was to hook up with a school in Thailand to do a project on water, it's one of the 20 global issues that is so important. And we used video cams, it was twice when we had the kids in Thailand and the kids in the U.S talking together about what these global issues are all about. If people want to do it, the resources are there.

Kate: And these were 7th graders, so they need to be highly sophisticated tertiary students. We can't wait until they get to college or graduate school. And I think schools like ours realize that we can begin to broaden the outlook of these students from the very beginning. We're a learning community, because we learn from them and we like to think that we send them out to a world ready to take leadership.

Richard: I would like to add also that I think it's very important for people at the elementary, middle school, and secondary school be involved in this discussion about what is appropriate, what can be done to internationalize schools. I think so often we hear from the tertiary side about the theory of it all but the people on the ground are these teachers and they should be involved in the discussion because I think it will lead to action much more quickly.

Q: One of the things that the school has done in recent years is to found a center on international education to work with schools throughout the Washington, D.C area, public as well as private, low income schools as well as more advantaged schools. So from that perspective you must have some insight into how a school that has never done this before can get started. Can you tell us something about that?

Kate: Being involved with the Center for International Education shows me how very special it is to help people broaden this perspective. In the sense of going on these trips with people for example who have never even left the Washington, D.C area, adults and children. And taking them places, preparing them to absorb what they see, interact with the people, think about a common issue whether it is hunger, water, homelessness, migration. Think about what it's like to be in someone else's shoes, to contextualize it for

your own experience here at home. And I think the center is taking students and teachers in the Washington area, and it's really a way for us to externalize what we do in our own school. It's saying to someone who, you know, I would really like to go to Paraguay, I want to know what it's like to create a community outside of a large urban area and to survive. How do people do it? How can I get an understanding of what I can bring back to my classroom to make that real for my students? You have to live it and you have to experience it.

So I think the center has done, in just its short life time, an amazing job of pulling people into that realm who normally would not have necessarily the opportunity or the inclination to do something like that. It's a very, very powerful structure for us to help schools but also for us to learn from them. Because every time we see a teacher or a student experience that, we learn from it. Because we learn in many ways how very lucky we are, but we also learn that there are so many different ways that you can see these things out there.

Q: What have you found to be the results and benefits of participating in these international exchange programs?

Richard: One of the principles of these programs is that they are teams of teachers and students from schools. One of the things is that we've learned is that the power of teachers and students together learning in another country, or learning at a seminar which we hold every year, is so much more than simply a teacher going out by him or herself or a student going out by him or herself. But they come back as a team. And what we do ask is that they engage in projects which will effect change in their schools. Part of the value of it for all of the students is the mix of students and teachers in the groups. That they come from all different parts of the greater Washington area, and in their interactions alone comes enormous value.

Kate: You see that in the Fellows Program which happens throughout the school year where students, about 50 students work together, focused on particular issues in the Washington, D.C community and learning about what they can do as young people to effect change. These are kids who normally would not in any way socialize with one another, they wouldn't hang out in the same areas, but all of a sudden here they are coming together once a month and talking about things that have meaning for each and every one of them. A different lens maybe for each and every one of them, but something that as young people they can grab onto and they can talk about and discuss in a way that makes sense for them.

Q: How do teachers and students pay for this?

Kate: Well that's a challenge and part of what we do and part of our Director for the Center for International Education, Hugh Riddleberger, from the very beginning has been working with, not just Washington Area foundations, but national foundations. It's fairly easy for schools and schools of privilege to fill the tuition for their teacher or the individual families for their own children but we're talking about public systems that are

already under tremendous stress to interject something as exotic as sending a teacher and a student off on a trip like this is a financial unreality. So much of what we do is to make that happen in as many ways possible. So it's a lot of fundraising, it's a lot of tapping on shoulders and knocking on doors and we have to continue to do that to make it work.

Q: Thank you very much.