

Educating Students for the 21st Century

New Zealand International Education Conference – International Keynote

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Tena Tatou Katoa. Good afternoon.

Everyone who is here today, including me, is participating in an educational venture that crosses national borders. I would like to begin my talk by giving you my own personal take on the great purpose we are all serving in this endeavor.

The reason why I want to start here is that I have seen plenty of international educational ventures struggle. Many times, the reason for their struggle was that their mission was ambiguous. To get more tuition income? To get better students? To reduce risk by diversifying the portfolio? Each of these goals is a reasonable one, but each goal could have a different implication for how one goes about internationalizing. If different parts of your organization are pursuing different goals they can easily find themselves working at cross purposes.

The simplest form of international education takes place any time a school admits a student from another country, simply because she satisfies all the criteria for admission. That laudable form of international education is what I call *purely passive internationalization*. For a very long time it was the overwhelmingly dominant form.

This afternoon, however, I am speaking about what I call *active internationalization* – a deliberate decision by a school to do something new, different from what it did before, in which the act of crossing borders is a goal in and of itself. In the first part of my talk, I want to put out for your

consideration the possibility that we should engage in active internationalization because our commitment to education requires it.

Let us begin with first principles. Whether you are engaged with primary, secondary, or tertiary education, you are part of a very long process designed to prepare students for lives of satisfaction and contribution. That preparation involves the acquisition of knowledge, the mastery of skills, and the development of virtues.

What knowledge, skills, and virtues are required for any individual student is personalized. Different people have different talents, interests, and needs. Moreover, certain kinds of resource-intensive education must be channeled to those who are best equipped to make use of it.

But we must acknowledge that, for all students, the bodies of knowledge, the skills, and the virtues that students should be developing have evolved over the past 40 years. Some things have become more important in the twenty-first century, especially for individuals who might end up playing leadership roles in their working environments.

Over the course of the past forty years, two forces have transformed human societies in every dimension: culturally, economically, and politically. Those forces are, first, information and communications technology, and, second, globalization. As educators, we have a duty to reflect on how those forces have changed what it means to be “well prepared” for adulthood.

Those forces have most assuredly not made “the old learning” obsolete. As an aside, I do remember thirty years ago hearing serious discussion about whether the invention of calculators meant young people no longer needed to learn how to add. Thank goodness that kind of foolishness is no longer prevalent, but I do sometimes hear faint echoes.

No, it remains just as important for today’s young people to become literate and numerate, to become precise and rigorous thinkers, to become familiar with the central ideas of science, the essentials of political history, and the touchstones of human arts and culture. And it remains just as important for today’s young people to develop their curiosity, em-

pathy, humility, generosity of spirit, courage, and commitment to authenticity.

But today's young people need to do more. And two items stand at the top of the list of new requirements.

The first, of course, is facility with the tools of information and communications technology. They are the hammer, saw, and screwdriver of the twenty-first century. All of us have a duty to look into the heart of our organizations and ask whether we are doing all we can to ensure that each of our students becomes fluent in the language of modern information and communications technology.

The second new requirement, however, goes even more directly to the work of everyone who is here today. That is the ability to work effectively with people from different cultures.

Forty years ago, China and America had very little to do with one another. It was entirely plausible for a Chinese child to believe that she had no need to understand Americans, and it was entirely plausible for an American child like me to grow up believing he had no need to understand Chinese people. All over the world, it was reasonable for people to define their frame of reference in national terms. We were all living in a framework that was bequeathed to us by the Peace of Westphalia at the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War. The fundamental unit of political organization was the nation-state. The fundamental principle of international law was non-interference. What happened in other lands was none of our business; sovereignty implied immunity from the meddling of outsiders.

In such a world, it was reasonable to think in terms of "independence." It was reasonable for young people to anticipate an adulthood in which what all that mattered was one's ability to be effective in interactions with people who shared a common language and a common frame of reference.

That era is over. National boundaries still matter, but the terms of engagement are post-Westphalian. We are profoundly and irreversibly interdependent. We share the same good things in life, whether they be

iPads, self-driving Mercedes cars, New Zealand milk, or movies about Middle Earth. And we face the same threats, including disease, climate change, recession, and terrorism. We do not share either good things or threats equally – yet – but all these things are now shared to some extent.

Today goods, services, capital, and people all zip around the world at breakneck speed. Perhaps paradoxically, that movement has caused us to appreciate much more profoundly both cultural similarity and cultural difference. The more time we spend with people who grew up in different cultures, the more we appreciate how much we have in common, but, at the same time, we come to see more clearly how different our worldviews can be.

Cultural differences are real. They are real sources of opportunity, and they are also real sources of threat.

Cultural differences carry with them the opportunities that attend multiple perspectives. When one observes a phenomenon from multiple perspective, one sees it in more dimensions. One perceives more complexity, and one becomes ever more capable of describing the phenomenon with precision. Similarly, when a multicultural group engages a problem, it is better able to see it from all sides, and it is better able to generate a long and creative list of potential responses.

Yet cultural differences also carry with them vastly amplified threats of misunderstanding. The book *The Geography of Thought* by Richard Nisbett is an exceptionally readable point of entry into the literature on culture-based differences in perception and analysis. And when different cultures have radically different ways of conveying such fundamental human values as respect and trust, the risk that one person might misinterpret another's motives becomes a near-certainty.

To be educated today means to be able to swim safely, happily, and productively in culturally diverse waters. And that leads immediately and directly to the fundamentally important questions: can the skill of multicultural effectiveness be taught, and if so how?

In my opinion, the answer to the first question – can multicultural effectiveness be taught? – is most decidedly yes. How can it best be

taught? In my opinion, the answer is a blend of explicit analysis and experiential self-discovery. I believe in the importance of telling students explicitly about cultural differences, and helping them to analyze the structure of those differences. But I believe the force of such learning is dramatically increased when integrated with experience, so students need to be pushed to interact one-on-one with people who are different, and to look at the world through the eyes of people who are different.

If students today need to be helped to master the skills of multicultural effectiveness, and if such mastery comes best through experiential engagement, then it follows automatically that our educational mission calls for the active internationalization of our institutions. How can we best pursue that objective?

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to this endeavor. The first is what I call *inbound internationalization*. Again, this is the familiar, traditional model, but if we know that the reason we are doing it is to nurture the skill of multicultural effectiveness in our students, then we now have a basis for determining whether we are doing it well or poorly.

If a New Zealand school chooses to accept students from abroad pursuant to an inbound internationalization agenda, how should it go about the task? I believe it should do so in a way that is personalized and intensely focused on how best to ensure that all its students emerge from the experience much better equipped to lead teams of multicultural individuals, some of whom come from New Zealand and some of whom do not.

That means mainstreaming. Resist the temptation to put foreign students into separate classes (except for English language classes), even if there may be coherent pedagogic reasons to do so. The gains of separation are more than offset by the lost opportunities for experiential learning.

And this is true about more than just classes. Students will have a completely natural tendency to form packs of individuals who are all from similar backgrounds. It is easier to spend your time with people who are similar to you, less stressful, less prone to misunderstanding, so it is the path of least resistance.

But self-segregation along ethnic lines is bad for communities. It is up to the leaders of those communities to talk directly with the students about the importance of mixing. It is important to say directly to the students that part of why mixing is valuable is that it create opportunities for misunderstanding and conflict along cultural lines. It is important to encourage them not to deny such misunderstandings when they occur, but rather to work together as a unified group to analyze them, understand their source, and develop techniques for resolving them.

The second approach to institutional internationalization is *outbound internationalization*. To be sure, a school may well have reasons to engage in outbound internationalization without having multicultural effectiveness be part of its mission. It is perfectly reasonable to say, “We’re just sharing the New Zealand approach to teaching maths, and we will leaving the teaching of multicultural competence to others.”

But if your ambitions include the teaching of multicultural effectiveness, then the project of outbound internationalization is a potentially attractive way to pursue those ambitions. During the remainder of my talk today, I will discuss some of the possibilities and challenges that arise when a western school decides to undertake outbound internationalization in China.

By way of background, you should know that for the past six years I have been living and working in China. During the first four years, I served as the chancellor and founding dean of the Peking University School of Transnational Law, known as “STL,” in Shenzhen, the first school outside the United States to offer a comprehensive American-style legal education.

STL is a project of inbound internationalization. Peking University is operating on its home soil, inside China. But the teaching of international effectiveness is a key part of its mission.

STL’s admissions are extremely competitive, and almost all the students are Chinese. So far, the internationalization has occurred at the faculty level. Very few members of the faculty are Chinese.

Our experience in helping promote multicultural effectiveness was very much trial and error. Slowly, over a period of years, we learned to help our foreign teachers recognize the ways in which cross-cultural misunderstanding would infiltrate and sometimes endanger their own conversations. And we learned to help those teachers develop effective ways to turn those moments into learning opportunities.

For the past two years, I have served as the founding Vice Chancellor of NYU Shanghai, a research university that includes a comprehensive four-year liberal arts and sciences undergraduate program.

NYU Shanghai was designed from the ground up to focus on the teaching of multicultural effectiveness. Half the students are required to hail from China; the other half are required to hail from the rest of the world. Every Chinese student has a non-Chinese roommate, and vice versa. On the first day of orientation, I talk to the students about cultural difference and multicultural effectiveness. I tell them this will be, simultaneously, the source of their greatest challenges and their greatest achievements during their college years. I tell them that we can provide an environment in which they can develop themselves, but it will be completely up to them to take advantage of the opportunity.

Our students spend their first two years in Shanghai, studying a multicultural core curriculum. The curriculum is taught in English, so our Chinese students must be proficient in that second language before they enroll. But we also require our non-Chinese students to become proficient in Mandarin before they graduate, since multilingualism is a prerequisite to full multicultural facility. Just as importantly, during their third year we require all our students to study outside China.

You see, NYU Shanghai has a very special double identity. As a matter of law, we are the first Sino-American joint venture university, a joint venture between NYU and East China Normal University that is incorporated under the laws of the People's Republic of China, accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education, and awarding official Chinese degrees that are attested to by official Chinese diplomas. But we are, at the same time, a campus of New York University, awarding degrees from the trustees of New York University, which is an entity incorporated in the Unit-

ed States and accredited by an American accrediting body called the Middle States Association.

After two years in Shanghai, all our students are required to spend 1 to 3 semesters in circulation. They must go study at one or more of NYU's 13 other campuses, distributed among the world's most important cities – cities like New York, Washington, London, Paris, Tel Aviv, and Sydney.

We fully embrace the view that, in today's world, adults need to become comfortable and effective living an expatriate life.

We are only just beginning our second year of teaching, but I can attest that our first class of students fully accepted the challenge and they wear their multicultural skills with pride. They deliberately formed student clubs with multinational leadership teams. They deliberately formed heterogeneous talent acts for the school talent shows. They think of themselves, and they present themselves, as world citizens.

Multicultural effectiveness is a key differentiator for twenty-first-century success. I see no reason why New Zealand, a nation of immigrants, cannot play a global leadership role in advancing the state of the art for teaching that skill. What it requires is that educational institutions reflect carefully on what that skill entails, and on what pedagogy will be most effective in nurturing it.

In carrying out that reflection, it is natural that so many of you are focusing on China, the world's most populous country and second-largest economy, a nation filled with young people who are eager to prepare themselves for a world that is eager to welcome their talents.

Most of you are already engaging that community of students through the mechanisms of inbound internationalization. Students from Guangdong and other Provinces, from Beijing and other cities, are rushing to New Zealand, just as they have been rushing to America. They are doing so younger, and in greater numbers, every year. But outbound internationalization – education by New Zealand entities within China – is much less common, in part because the Chinese government restricts the ability of foreign educational institutions to set up shop inside its borders.

And it is almost impossible to do so without a Chinese joint venture partner.

Ideas for joint programs at all levels are proliferating throughout China, but fewer than 50% are receiving approval. Approval is a long, slow, painstaking process. To navigate that process most assuredly requires a significant amount of multicultural effectiveness.

So during the last part of my talk, permit me to share some reflections on the phenomenon of cooperation between Chinese and foreign partners. As you will see, I am providing these reflections in a voice that is decidedly American. Since Americans like to kid around, I will be poking fun at both foreign and Chinese cultural styles. But please do understand, I am doing so in a spirit of affection for both communities, believing that the project of international cooperation is enormously important, and that its success depends on our ability to laugh at ourselves and others, because the best humor tends to be grounded in truth.

With apologies to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, I want to begin by describing a progression of emotional stages that many foreigners experience over the course of their engagement with China. It is not a pretty sight to observe, and it is not a pleasant experience to undergo; fortunately it is a progression that can be avoided if you are aware of just how common it is.

The first stage is what I might call, “Delusional Condescension.” In this stage, the foreigner tends to say things like:

“Whereas China is a poor, backwards, authoritarian communist country that teaches by rote, I happen to come from a noble, enlightened, democratic capitalist country with the best universities in the world – places where we all swim freely in the invigorating waters of academic freedom. We might consider helping a little bit – either in the charitable spirit of noblesse oblige, or perhaps to pick up a little bit of useful revenue – but only if we can be persuaded that we will not somehow be contaminated by the exercise.”

In my experience, the Chinese are spectacularly adept at graciously pretending they do not notice this attitude, and then efficiently moving on to more appropriate intellectual partners.

Fortunately, we see less and less delusional condescension these days. More and more, foreigners seem ready to jump straight into the second stage, which I might call, “Shock and Awe.” In this stage, the foreigner is blown away by China’s scale and pace of improvement and tends to say things like:

“Can you believe the incredible labs they have? That infrastructure is better than ours! I just heard that next year China will confer more Ph.D.’s in engineering than the US, and 7 times more bachelors degrees! Next year China will publish as many articles in peer reviewed journals as the U.S.! We have nothing to offer!”

Foreigners in Stage 2 are in a better place than foreigners in Stage 1. They are surely attracted to, and respectful of, this new China, so different from the impression they grew up with. Unfortunately, foreigners in Stage 2 often seem to get carried away, becoming so giddy that they are prone to going through an unnecessary emotional crash in Stage 3.

Stage 3 is what I might call, “Disappointment, Even Betrayal.” In this phase, the foreigner tends to say things like:

“Goodness gracious, those diplomas aren’t worth the paper they’re printed on. The students are never asked to think for themselves. Even worse, the faculty have no sense of academic integrity, so most of the so-called publications are worthless – that’s why the Relative Citation Index for published Chinese scholarship is so low. I suppose that’s what you get when you give tenure without any serious outside review.”

The disillusionment that characterizes Stage 3 tends to carry an intensity that is directly proportional to the giddiness that the foreigner felt in Stage 2. This is very sad, because this is a moment when partnerships can disintegrate needlessly, just when the partners were on the threshold of Stage 4.

Stage 4 is what I might call, “Patient, But Critical Admiration.” Those foreigners who reach it are the most likely to build strong, sustainable relationships. The voice of this person is the voice of a balanced realist:

“China’s glass is half full and the glass is half empty. In thirty years, China’s universities have come an astonishing distance, but they still have a long way to go before they teach or do research at international levels. China’s university leaders are not deluded about their strengths and weaknesses, and they are eager to work with strong, realistic counterparts. If you are careful to choose the right Chinese partner, it is possible to do very high quality collaborative work together.”

How can one move most gracefully and effectively in the direction of Stage 4? How can one build a partnership like the one we have with ECNU, a partnership that is healthy, constructive, and mature?

I will conclude by offering a dozen pointers: three general pointers, and nine more that pertain to the specific matter of east-west cross-cultural collaboration. I have vetted these pointers with Chinese and non-Chinese friends who have done this sort of work, so I do have a fair amount of confidence in them. But your mileage may vary – be ready to throw them out and follow your own instincts at a moment’s notice.

Here are my three general pointers:

1. *Start small, not big.* A venture in China should not be part of your “core portfolio” of academic ventures. You should instead evaluate it as a high risk, potentially high return, addition to your basket of “alternatives.” If it does not go well, you need to be able to cut your losses, and that means managing the scale of the project carefully.

2. *Choose partner, not project.* You should learn everything imaginable about your Chinese partner. It is important to be sure the partner is a “status peer.” If the partner is perceived to be much more prestigious than you, they may not commit the energy and resources you will need if the project is to succeed. If the partner is perceived to be much less prestigious than you, others in China may not respect your judgment.

3. *Dream academic, not economic.* It should be absolutely clear to everyone why cooperation will serve the academic missions of both you and your Chinese partner. If that is not the case, you are setting yourself up for failure.

Those are my general pointers. I will now add nine more specific pointers about the cross-cultural dimensions of a project like this:

A. *Value the learning.* Know that it may be important to walk away from the first possible project after you have done your due diligence. That will be psychologically easier if you value the exploratory process as a special opportunity for you to learn how to work in a cross-cultural collaboration with a Chinese partner. If you don't think the learning will have intrinsic value, I recommend you not even start down the path.

B. *Properly calibrate the scale of cultural differences.* The proper measure is this. Cultural differences between Chinese and New Zealanders are substantial enough to lead to frequent misunderstandings. At the same time, cultural differences between Chinese and New Zealanders are not so substantial as to prevent strong, productive, trusting partnerships.

C. *Include a Chinese team member.* Make sure that you have a Chinese person as a trusted member of your team. Ideally it should be someone who has lived on the mainland during the past 20 years. Without such a team member, you will be flying in the dark.

D. *Everyone should stay themselves.* The point is not for you to act Chinese or for your Chinese partner to act like a New Zealander. The point is rather for you each to be able to understand the other in a spirit of sympathetic engagement. You need to reach the point where you laugh, not cry, about your differences.

For example, be honest and direct in revealing what is really important to you, but expect your partner to be cautious and indirect in revealing what is really important to him or her. It is good for all involved to appreciate how natural these differences are.

E. *Maintain a low equilibrium.* Try your best not to get too excited if things look good. Even more importantly, and try your best not to get upset or angry when things go badly.

F. *Expect skepticism.* Even if your Chinese partner is the one who brought the idea to you, expect that partner will be deeply skeptical about your motives at first. The general belief in China is that westerners see the country mostly as a “market opportunity.” It will take time to get past that.

G. *Pay no attention to flattery.* Your Chinese counterpart will flatter you early and often. The speaker will overstate his or her true feelings about you. Please understand, the speaker is not trying to trick or manipulate you. He or she has simply been taught since childhood that flattery is “good manners” and not flattering is insulting.

H. *Hurry up and wait.* Be prepared for long, inexplicable delays. Then be prepared for equally inexplicable demands that you act at break-neck speed.

I. *Laugh often.* This kind of cross-cultural partnership cannot be created overnight. Be patient. Know that you will face ups and downs. Consider the venture a unique opportunity to experience, in a new and deeper way, the remarkable tragicomedy of life.

I have spoken for a while this afternoon, so with your permission I will summarize my most important points. First, there are many reasons to internationalize, but please be clear about what reasons are driving your agenda. Second, please consider structuring your agenda by reference to an educational mission that includes preparing students for adult lives of satisfaction and contribution, which entails increased focus on the skill of multicultural effectiveness. A well-designed international educational program can nurture that skill in uniquely powerful ways. Finally, if your mission leads you to want to explore an outbound project into China, do so with your eyes open, and be sure to choose the right partner.

I thank you most sincerely for having given me your attention this afternoon.