

Education, Training and the New Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

Diplomacy has undergone significant changes over the last hundred years. The secretive nature of traditional diplomacy took much of the blame for the outbreak of the First World War (Schmitt, 1958). This led to a move away from the traditional few-to-few style of diplomacy to a few-to-many open diplomacy which characterised the latter part of the twentieth century. The new public diplomacy, and the rise in importance of cultural relations as an aspect of this, acknowledges that the technological and mobility changes within a globalised society are creating a situation in which we are all potential ambassadors. This is highlighted in the Demos (2007) report on Cultural Diplomacy: "Where the rise of public diplomacy could be described as the shift from few-to-few communication (traditional diplomacy) to few-to-many, this era will be characterised by the growth of many-to-many interactions." (Bound et al, 2007: 75) The impact of this can be felt in many areas, particularly those of cultural exchange. However, perhaps the most important contribution to an environment in which we are all in part responsible for the image of our country is that of education and training. This may range from the teaching of the national language abroad to international exchange programmes and a variety of other types of post-compulsory teaching and learning. International education and training aims to build tolerance, understanding and communication, and develop relationships between nations through the intercultural learning of its citizens, particularly in higher education. This is education's contribution to diplomacy. The importance of recognising and appreciating diversity is becoming fundamental in the multi-cultural societies in which many of us now live, and the decentralisation of higher education, with foreign university campuses and student exchanges, is vital for preparing today's young people for life in a global community and economy. This paper will examine the connections between the decentralisation of education and training and the new public diplomacy, together with the implications for policy at both national and institutional levels. Attention will be paid to the traditional relationship between education and cultural diplomacy to identify whether this relationship is indeed changing in the light of the new public diplomacy and what this means to international relations. It will look at the changing nature of the structures involved in cultural relations activities and the extent to which relationships are becoming more horizontal as they shed the often unilateral, colonial-style flow of information associated with cultural diplomacy and with propaganda activities in the past.

Introduction

The concept of public diplomacy is by no means new. Governments have long been aware of the need to influence public opinion in foreign countries. There are many ideas bound up in the concept of public diplomacy. Melissen (2005) examines three of these: Propaganda, nation branding and foreign cultural relations, noting that the two former concepts are "about the communication of information and ideas to foreign publics with a view to changing their attitudes towards the originating country to reinforce existing beliefs." (Melissen, 2005: 16) The latter "has traditionally been close to diplomacy, although it is clearly distinct from it, but recent developments in both fields now reveal considerable overlap between the two concepts." (*ibid.*: 16). It seems that the new public diplomacy is moving closer to the notion of cultural relations and away from the role of propaganda and nation branding. International organisations and national governments should acknowledge and understand this change if they are to effectively influence foreign publics.

The relationship between governments and foreign publics has, traditionally, been a hierarchical affair with the focus on disseminating information about the country that shows it in a positive light. Lord Carter defines public diplomacy as: "Work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals." (Carter of Coles, 2005). This same concept is interpreted by David Welsh in a slightly more cynical way as: "The deliberate attempt to influence the opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values for the specific purpose, consciously designed to serve the interest of the propagandists and their political masters, either directly or indirectly." (Welsh, 1999: 24)

In today's multi-actor international environment, where civil society has a powerful voice through the medium of non-governmental organisations, trans-national advocacy networks, international organisations and a more politically organised, aware and cyber literate public, there is a clear demand for a public diplomacy that is not so bound to the *raison d'état*, and instead acknowledges the advantages of mutual benefit and equal participation. It is from this that we see the emergence of new public diplomacy. Brian Hocking makes the distinction between the two by defining two models for public diplomacy: the traditional, hierarchical approach and the new, network based approach (Hocking, 2005: 30). Ali Fisher expands on this idea noting that "a network model that is more than a bilateral mechanism for the dissemination of a particular agenda

can benefit from engagement with participants from various civil societies, each contributing to common, beneficial outcomes.” (Fisher 2006: 4) Fisher looks at the way the two models interact and how the British Council should react to these new less state-centric ideas that surround the changing nature of public diplomacy. The environment has changed and so too has the game, so the British Council must move with this in order to develop within the changing international arena. Fisher notes that “the British Council has sought to develop a genuinely network based approach” (*ibid*: 5) from within the hierarchical conception of public diplomacy in the UK.

The New Diplomacy

There seems to be more and more support for the idea that the future of international cooperation for peace and development can only truly be achieved through genuine cooperation and shared values and these can never be enforced successfully in a hierarchical way. Cultural relations work has often been regarded as a ‘soft’ method of influencing publics, in contrast to ‘hard’ military measures. This new development in public diplomacy, on the one hand, apparently makes ‘soft’ power even softer. On the other hand, however, there is support for the argument that, when initiatives are taken on a mutual basis, they are far more likely to change behaviour within the target audience (*ibid*: 7). Indeed, we move away from this strong notion of ‘power’, towards something that looks more like cooperation. Energy is saved by avoiding the difficult task of altering opinion by propaganda of an unreceptive audience. Benefits may be reaped in both directions from a project based environment in which parties contribute on their own terms, willingly and with greater enthusiasm. New network based public diplomacy will be better received because it is “a two-way street” (Melissen, 2005: 18): unlike propaganda it listens as well as tells and is therefore more likely to build trust and respect than the traditional models. The question is whether an organisation with established systems and practices, the size of the British Council, will be able to move comfortably from one emphasis to the other, within the context of a world that is built on extreme imbalances of power, which limit the real nature of any partnership formed.

In so many of the ways in which culture interacts with diplomacy, we see the need for education and training to make the project successful. Indeed, the new environment of many-to-many public diplomacy means that the general population’s attitude to international issues and cultural affairs is key to projecting a positive image of a country. This makes the idea of educational partnerships vital within the new public diplomacy as it is one of the few areas where we can realistically hope to genuine two-way cooperation. Having international connections is becoming increasingly important to most universities. Links between higher education institutions is perhaps the fastest growing area of cultural relations. Academic and professional links and partnerships have always been important for progress in science and technology, but this is now taking place on a much wider scale, with many universities taking advantage of partnerships with British Universities or campuses overseas, as well as creating links with foreign universities. The way these partnerships are conducted gives an interesting insight in the role of new public diplomacy in this type of exchange.

One study that examines the relationship of higher educational links in the changing environment is Canto and Hannah’s article on academic collaboration between the UK and Brazil. The collaboration was organised by the British Council and the Brazilian Federation Agency responsible for funding higher education in order to “promote and facilitate academic collaboration between universities in the UK and Brazil.” (Canto & Hannah, 2001: 26) The project was known in the UK as “higher education links” and in Brazil as “joint research projects” and was financed by the Department for International Development (DFID) and administered by the British Council (*ibid*: 26). It set out to “replace traditional North – South relationships of donor and recipient with genuine academic partnerships.” (*ibid*: 27) This sounds very positive. The interest of this article is in its examination of the way Britain interprets this ‘partnership’, as this is very telling about Britain’s attitude to this type of educational exchange and also its view of public diplomacy in general.

The article looks at neo-colonialism, defining it as constituting “the deliberate policies of the industrialised countries to maintain domination.” (*ibid*: 28) Neo-colonialism is, in many ways, more dangerous than its more overt predecessor because it gives the outward appearance of independence while policy is really directed from the outside. “Education is one essential element of the neo-colonial structure. It helps to maintain and, to some extent, extend and perpetuate colonial links.” (*ibid*: 29). One way in which this is very obvious is through language; use of one language over another, which is almost always the dominant language, “does not necessarily indicate asymmetrical partnerships.” (*ibid*: 29). The Brazilian students and professors involved in the partnership had to speak good English, but the UK students did not even need to try to learn any Portuguese. Selvaratnam (1988) indicates “that the move from aid to partnerships, instead of opening space for an advanced cooperation, has reinforced the Western imperialistic attitude.” (*ibid*: 30)

Canto and Hannah then go on to look at the distinction between horizontal and vertical partnerships, which tie in with early discussions of traditional and network based approaches to public diplomacy. A horizontal partnership is a relationship of genuine equals who understand each other's weaknesses as well as strengths. This should include three elements. First, "the existence of previous knowledge of the other partner to establish realistic expectations," secondly, "the genuine sharing of each others' experiences," and finally "the application of each others' knowledge rather than a one-way transfer." (*ibid.*: 32). According to the study, none of these were fully reached in any of the links looked at. Indeed, one of Britain's main motivations may have been the hope of recruiting more (Brazilian) students to their post-graduate programmes (*ibid.*: 36).

The study concludes that in "each of the case studies examined, vertical or traditional elements continue to exist alongside horizontal or advanced elements, representing neither a neo-colonial nor an equal partnership, but elements of both. This is referred to here as an advanced neo-colonial partnership." (*ibid.*: 37). This study is extremely informative and presents an interesting way to approach future study of this subject in terms of all types of educational exchange. It is possible that many links involving UK institutions have a similar attitude towards academic exchanges, yet with the wide variety of higher education links available there are many avenues for further study, to determine the extent to which these links may be vertical or horizontal and how they fit into the role of public diplomacy.

School Links

Another area in which there is growing evidence of horizontal, network based, relationships are school links and partnerships and use of these in teaching global issues in schools. This is important for new public diplomacy both in the nature of the relationships that are being formed and the cultural diplomacy objectives that these meet, and also for creating citizens with a positive attitude toward cultural differences, who will give a better impression to visiting foreign nationals in the future. "We are no longer represented just by our leaders. Knowingly or not, we are all representatives of our countries and we have the tools to make an impact. We are all diplomats now. It is therefore critical that we ensure that our British citizens – especially young people – have the skills and capacity to cope with this new era of global cultural connection." (Bound *et al.* 2007: 76). We therefore need to educate our children to bring about a change gradually in attitudes to global issues and to foreigners in order to show our country in a good light whether at home or abroad. The *Cultural Diplomacy Report* (Bound *et al.* 2007) highlights the importance of "long term activities designed to open up one country to another, rather than project an image or message for immediate consumption." (*ibid.*: 24) It also points out the challenge of enabling "mass populations to develop the vital skills of cultural literacy." (*ibid.*: 19) Changing attitudes through better education of the issues at school is one of the most significant aspects of cultural relations and public diplomacy.

Citizenship has become an important part of the curriculum over the last ten years in UK schools, particularly in England and in Wales, with global and international issues receiving more attention. This is something that can be taught across many subjects, not only modern languages and geography. Children and young people are coming into contact with international issues more than ever before, through a range of media from the Internet to personal contact through travel or migration. It is therefore becoming more important to equip young people to be good ambassadors for their country when they travel abroad or in their interactions with foreign nationals whom they meet at home. In order to do this they need a clear understanding of international affairs, and to see these from a world perspective, rather than from prejudices caused by intolerance and lack of familiarity with the issues.

The government supports the introduction of the global dimension in schools across the curriculum and provides guidelines such as the *Guidance for Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum*, provided by the British Council and other partners. This has laid out eight key concepts: "Global citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, social justice, sustainable development and values and perceptions." (DFID, 2005: 5). The report looks to facilitate the teaching of these issues through all stages of school, from foundation to key stage four and beyond. Perhaps the one that has received the most support is the idea of Global Citizenship. According to Oxfam, Education for Global Citizenship is "asking questions and developing critical thinking skills, ... acknowledging the complexity of global issues, revealing the global part of everyday local life, ... [and] understanding how we relate to the environment and to each other as human beings." (Oxfam, 2006: 3).

The British Council

An important aspect of this work is international linking. The British Council is important to the work done to enable schools to find partner schools all over the world, conduct projects with students in far away places and take an interest in developments in parts of the world where there is an international connection. Much of this is done through the Global Gateway, a web site set up to help to bring the international dimension to schools and provide help, advice and resources to establish and maintain links. The British Council also runs the International School Award (ISA) which is a government initiative that rewards schools for the international elements they are incorporating into the curriculum, for example whether they have international links and partner schools.

There are other organisations that contribute to this work, notably UNESCO with its Associated Schools Project Network (ASPNet). This project is committed “to promoting the ideals of UNESCO by conducting pilot projects in favour of better preparing children and young people to meet effectively the challenges of an increasingly complex and interdependent world.” (UK National Commission of UNESCO Website) Its emphasis is on reinforcing the *four pillars of Learning for the 21st Century*: “learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together.” (*ibid*) ASPNet works at national, regional and international level to improve the quality of education and promote development (*ibid*). The project works on four themes: World concerns and the role of the United Nations system, Human rights, democracy and tolerance, Intercultural learning, Environmental concern (*ibid*).

It seems that, in a system of public diplomacy that relies on citizens to act as ambassadors for their country, we need to be sure that such citizens will be receptive to exchanges with foreign nationals, that they will show friendliness and willingness to understand and empathize with situations they may never have encountered first hand, and will be able to accept cultures different from their own. Indeed, as we move closer to a multi-cultural, global village, we realise that culture is an intangible and organic process of flux, rather than something concrete and clearly defined. Cultures are “meeting mingling and morphing” (Bound *et al.* 2007: 19) and we must all, as citizens, be ready to adapt to this. For this reason, teaching of the international and global dimension in schools is something that may prove key to cultural relations in the future.

Vickers (2004) notes the changes that have taken place creating the need for a ‘new public diplomacy’. She defines this as “a blurring of traditional distinctions between international and domestic information activities, between public and traditional diplomacy and between cultural diplomacy, marketing and news management.” (*ibid.* 191) This has been manifested in Britain as a “repackaging of diplomacy for public consumption, rather than a rethinking of the paradigm of diplomacy. There is an increase in the role of public diplomacy, but this is mostly state centric in focus with the public being the passive recipients of diplomacy.” (*ibid.* 192). In many ways this concurs with earlier interpretations of traditional British cultural diplomacy. It seems that this mono-directional cultural diplomacy may be an important element of British cultural diplomacy that is difficult to escape from.

Nevertheless, it is not impossible. Indeed, it may be that the only way to move beyond the stiff style of diplomacy, to which Britain has become accustomed, may be to look at the relationship between cultural relations and education and training. Culture can be portrayed in a plethora of ways; it is far more than ‘traditional cultural events’ and ‘the arts.’ Culture is every thing that makes the experience of living in one place over another unique. Education is the most powerful, focussed and flexible tool available to share values and ideas and think collectively on global issues. So, while official diplomacy may be trapped in traditional hierarchical practices, cultural relations based on education and exchange within a commonly beneficial, network based model is an important aspect of new public diplomacy.

There are issues to consider here. Anyone can be a cultural ambassador these days and this is what makes international exchange so interesting. It is so hard to regulate the experience that a student will have, yet such experience is one of the strongest forms of cultural diplomacy today. The issue of image can be marketed and this is part of public diplomacy, but the network capacity of the ‘word of mouth’ by those involved can make an impact on the image of a country and this cannot be controlled. But care can be taken to ensure that international students are at least given as much opportunity as possible to interact with people from the country in which they are living and to experience more than organised events, which can only give a painted picture of the culture, quite different from an authentic experience of living in that country for a substantial period of time. Affections and annoyances are formed from these real life elements of culture and this is what the international students will take home with them. It is for this reason that it must tie in with the

international and global dimension in schools, as well as international exchanges in higher education, as this will enable the next generation grow up with more understanding and tolerance and an interest in other cultures with a higher level of cultural sensitivity.

Outline of the Study

In this forthcoming study we intend to examine links and partnerships in both higher education and in schools. The aim is to discover two things: First, whether these experiences provide a setting for greater cultural awareness and understanding of international issues. Questionnaires and interviews will be used with key informants and with groups of school and university students, half of whom are involved in a linking programme, and half of whom are not. Secondly, to consider whether these partnerships are a neo-colonial or an equal relationship, why this is the case and where improvements can be made. It will also be interesting to note whether those with more equal partnerships are indeed more successful. For this we will use a definition similar to that provided by Canto and Hannah (2001).

In UK education today a series of steps have been taken to adapt to the global village in which we live. In higher education in particular there is a huge drive towards the internationalisation of education, and this should mean graduates whether from the UK or abroad, with a high level of cultural sensitivity and a sound understanding of global and intercultural affairs. We will use New Public Diplomacy as a framework through which to look at whether partnerships and links in education reinforce a neo-colonial attitude, or whether they encourage mutual understanding, thus developing global citizens who will act as effective ambassadors for their countries in the future.

This paper has made particular reference to the British Council and UK public diplomacy. In this initial study we intend to look at UK links with a range of other countries. In the future it would be interesting to do a comparative study looking at how this compares with the public diplomacy work of other major nations. In terms of educational partnership projects, these are far more likely to succeed and build positive attitudes and cultural sensitivity if they are genuinely mutually beneficial, horizontal and equal partnerships. Countries, particularly former colonial powers, need to be careful when claiming to support mutual links that in practice may be neo-colonial activities, serving to maintain the *status quo*. Recommendations on the future of academic partnerships will be based on this premise.

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