International Education and the International Baccalaureate

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International Education and the International Baccalaureate

by
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Introduction

The International Baccalaureate (IB) originally was a solution to a problem. It was designed as a way to allow students in international schools to qualify for universities in any country, but it soon became something more important. Its combination of academic rigor and international education led to it being embraced by schools all over the world, and especially in the United States.

As international trade expanded in the second half of the 20th century, more children followed their globally mobile parents around the world and were educated in international schools. They needed a qualification that could be studied anywhere and then used to give entry to the university of their choice, usually back home.

The idea was not new — it was first suggested in 1925 — but in 1968 it was finally realized when the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) was created as a Swiss foundation with its headquarters in Geneva. Two years later, students from 10 schools in nine different countries took the first IB diploma examinations. Today the IBO is working with 1,380 schools in 117 countries, and the largest number of those schools are in the
United States. The IB diploma is formally recognized in more than 100 countries across the world.

The pioneers of the IB diploma took the best they could find from the Anglo-Saxon and European education traditions and molded them into a new program. But soon they realized they were exploring new territory. Blending these traditions and creating new curricula presented difficult problems. How do you design a course of history, of art, of literature or economics that will satisfy a multicultural class in a typical international school?

The earliest Act of Foundation describes the IBO’s principal objective as “to promote and administer an international examination giving access to higher education in all countries.” That university qualification has not changed. However, U.S. educators and parents also appreciate the need for young people to embrace and comprehend the wider world. In addition, the growth of terrorism, its links to religious extremism, and the response of American foreign policy all point to the importance of broadening international understanding through international education. For this reason, and because of the program’s academic rigor, many U.S. schools have adopted the IB.

The combination of academic rigor and internationalism is reflected in the IBO’s mission statement, revised in 2002:

The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging
programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

International education has become very important both politically and economically. No education system can remain isolated from economic needs, and those needs have acquired a strong international flavor. People in commerce need to communicate in a foreign language and they need to understand different cultural traditions if they are to negotiate foreign contracts successfully. Increasingly, people need to contribute productively to multicultural teams. All this has put pressure on national systems of education to acquire an international perspective. For example, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley said in 2000:

I strongly believe that the growth of democracy, economic prosperity and economic stability throughout the world is linked to the advance of education. This is one of the strongest reasons why the United States should have an active and strong international education agenda. Education and democracy go hand in hand.

Two years later, his Republican successor, Secretary Rod Paige, referred to the events of 11 September 2001 and noted that an astonishing 83% of young Americans surveyed by the National Geographic Society could not find Afghanistan on a map. Paige said:

No longer can we afford to focus only on the domestic. Our view must turn more outward towards the
world, nurturing relationships with other countries and improving international studies in our schools.

I am directing that we do a better job of exposing our students in this country to other languages, cultures, and challenges outside our borders. (Paige 2002)

One way in which the IBO has met that challenge is with two programs that cover the junior high school and the elementary years. The Middle Years Programme and the Primary Years Programme, combined with the Diploma Programme, allow schools to provide high-quality international education from kindergarten through 12th grade.
What Is International Education?

The terms "international school" and "international education" are not synonymous. Many "international schools" are international in title only. In terms of the experience they offer to their students and their expatriate families, they are protected islands of national education, often American, British, or French.

The first step toward international education — developing an "international awareness" — is achieved when politicians take an interest in what is going on in education in the rest of the world, for example, by questioning why their nation's students fail to compete successfully in mathematics with those in Singapore. The first step often would be to have someone visit Singapore to learn the secret of its success and then to try transplanting that secret (not always very successfully) into the national system. International awareness is the world of international testing, comparative research, visiting delegations, and global conferences.

The next step toward international education is taken when international elements are introduced into different parts of the school's national program, for example, by giving a special emphasis to learning foreign lan-
guages or widening the reading list to include foreign authors. This is adding an "international dimension." An international dimension encourages students and teachers to participate in exchanges with their peers in other countries. It also includes the regular celebration of the somewhat disparagingly labeled "Five Fs" of international education: food, festivals, folklore, fashion, and famous people.

We currently are engaged in a search for an education that recognizes the realities of the 21st century. This new international education can be called "international mindedness" (Hill 2000). In our search for experiences that develop international mindedness, we must use a language that includes such difficult concepts as diversity and culture, shared humanity, and universal values. These ideas may well shape the vocabulary of education in the future.

At the heart of international education lies a fundamental tension between human unity and human diversity. Learning to live with this ambiguity is the essential challenge of international mindedness (Walker 2000). We are all human beings, entitled to rights that have been enshrined in such documents as the United Nations Universal Declaration of 1948. Our basic humanity has been slowly and painfully shaped over the ages and is founded on such widely shared values as justice, honesty, altruism, and compassion. The fact that we aspire to, but rarely seem to display, these values emphasizes the importance of making them explicit in education programs. This has always been a distinctive feature of the International Baccalaureate.
At the same time, cultural difference is what makes sense of most people’s lives; and there is little evidence that the onward march of globalization is reducing the world to a state of cultural uniformity. On the contrary, the passionate and often aggressive defense of tradition, language, and religion is stronger than ever, so we must look at ways of understanding and learning to live with diversity. This means looking at empathy, cultural awareness, communication, and collaboration.

There are four core components of an international education: emotional intelligence, cultural understanding, communication, and collaboration. They are the tools to help young people make sense of an increasingly diverse world and to contribute to a more peaceful future by learning to negotiate differences, to the point of accepting that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

*Emotional Intelligence.* Trying to make sense of our own feelings, which is a necessary precursor to understanding the feelings of others and to the possibility of empathy with them, is a fundamental part of building a life that is more at ease with diverse cultures. This is a key component of international education and an integral part of the IB Primary Years Programme:

The transdisciplinary themes have global significance; they promote an awareness of the human condition and an understanding that there is a commonality of human experience. The children explore this common ground collaboratively, from the multiple perspectives of their individual experiences and backgrounds. This
sharing of experience increases the children’s awareness of, and sensitivity to, the experiences of others beyond the local or national community. It is central to the programme and a critical element in developing an international perspective, which must begin with the ability to consider the point of view of someone else in the same class. (IBO 2002a, p. 11)

**Cultural Understanding.** Understanding culture, what it comprises (including its religious dimension) and why it defines who we are as human beings and the way we think, is the second essential component of international mindedness. It is also an integral part of the IB Middle Years Programme:

For adolescents, [intercultural awareness] means considering the many facets of the concepts of culture, and experiencing and reflecting on its manifestations in various contexts. This is particularly important at an age when adolescents discover and affirm an identity while they experience the need to be accepted by a social group, when they discover a cultural heritage increasingly influenced and transformed by a globalized world. By encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, intercultural awareness not only fosters tolerance and respect, but also aims to develop empathy and understanding, the acceptance of others’ rights in being different. (IBO 2002b, p. 5)

Cultural awareness will help students be sensitive to the different interpretations that can be put on a canonical event. One group’s Day of Triumph is likely to be another’s Day of Humiliation, and a determination to address these issues openly from different standpoints
and without cultural bias is the true sign of an internationally minded teacher. In the words of psychologist Jerome Bruner, "Deciding whether or not to accept this challenge is what makes [education] either a somewhat dangerous pursuit or a rather drearily routine one" (1996, p. 15).

Communication. Insensitive communication with other people is due less to a hesitation in speaking their language and more to the assumption that they should speak ours. While a school-based foreign language program is unlikely to produce bilingual fluency, it certainly should encourage a willingness to communicate and a respect for others who speak different tongues. The importance attached to learning languages is one of the most distinctive hallmarks of the IB programs:

The role of language, the mother tongue, and the study of languages, have a special place in each programme's curriculum design. It is through language that we access our own and each other's culture. The potential of culture to foster multilingualism from early childhood is fundamental to the sequence of programmes. (IBO 2002c)

Collaboration. It is difficult to imagine a school encouraging an appreciation of diversity against a background of either wholly independent learning or didactic instruction. Collaborating in teams, in planning projects, and in supporting the learning of others brings an awareness of the diverse contributions people can make to a common task. Older students will be able to learn from working with people who are not part of the peer
group, which is why community service plays such an important part in the IB's programs:

The most meaningful CAS [Creativity, Action, Service] experience comes from spending time with others to build relationships and develop the self-worth of both server and served. (IBO 2001)

International education has a history. It has a political home. It has a pedagogy that has been developed largely in international schools. It has its own distinctive set of concepts. It is acquiring a distinctive language. International education has now become an intellectually robust discipline with the potential to contribute to the necessary reform of public education.

The International Baccalaureate has become the tangible expression of international education, and in many parts of the world the two are synonymous. Since the development of the IBO's newest programs for the primary and middle years, the IBO has been able to offer schools around the world a way to reform their education programs to make them more relevant for the 21st century global society.
The IBO Programs

The three IBO programs (IB Diploma, Middle Years, and Primary Years Programmes) were developed at the curriculum and assessment center in Cardiff, Wales, UK, in a process that involves close collaboration between IB staff, teachers in the schools, and external consultants. These programs are reviewed regularly. The sustained involvement of teachers on program committees, as examiners (some 3,500 worldwide), as workshop leaders, and as members of the governance structure of the IBO means that the organization is quick to respond to messages coming from the classroom. Unlike most systems of education, the IBO is not answerable to any particular government. Instead, it is answerable to the professionals in the schools. The phrase, “the family of IB schools,” has not become common among members by chance.

It is not possible to buy the IBO programs off the shelf. Instead, to become an IB World School, each school must go through an authorization process. This process is the same for each school, regardless of the country in which it is located.
Offices in New York, Buenos Aires, Geneva, and Singapore receive the formal applications from schools in each of the IBO's four regions: North America, Latin America, Africa/Europe/Middle East, and Asia-Pacific. The IBO office provides support to the schools as they progress from candidate to authorized status in a process that culminates in a two-day visit from an IBO-appointed team. Schools are required to appoint a program coordinator, who acts as the main channel of communication with the IBO, and to train their teachers in special workshops in order to learn about a holistic approach to education and to understand the programs contained in the IBO's published guides. In 2003 more than 20,000 teachers participated in the IB workshops.

The authorization process is tough but collegiate, with professionals working together toward a common goal. In order to provide additional support and to reach more educators, the IB has developed an online curriculum center. That online support allows teachers across the world to learn from each other and to share best practice.

Support is maintained once the school has achieved its authorized status. All administrative processes, including the registration of examination candidates, are conducted online through a secure website known as Ibnet. Each school's progress is monitored regularly in a number of ways by the regional office, and a formal evaluation of the program is carried out several years after authorization.

Not surprisingly, a number of local self-help IB associations have grown up, including 14 in the United States.
Some of the oldest of these local IB associations (for example, those in Florida, Texas, and California) play key roles in advising schools, mentoring new schools, organizing workshops, and lobbying political groups.

With the development of a portfolio of programs from early childhood to high school graduation, the IBO made a clear statement about its priorities for a modern school curriculum. The three programs have these characteristics in common:

- Contain a strong international dimension.
- Require study across a broad and balanced range of knowledge domains.
- Offer the opportunity for in-depth study.
- Emphasize the importance of learning languages.
- Examine issues from different perspectives.
- Encourage the application of learning to situations outside the classroom.
- Promote the development of learning skills.
- Provide opportunities for both individual and team work.
- Include a community service component.
- Mandate the related professional development of its teachers.

A school or school district interested in introducing an IBO program will find general information on the organization’s public website: www.ibo.org. Details of the application and authorization process are available from the regional offices: ibna@ibo.org (North America), ibaem@ibo.org (Africa/Europe/Middle East), ibla@ibo.org (Latin America), and ibap@ibo.org (Asia-Pacific).
The Diploma Programme

In order to achieve the IB diploma, a student is required to study six academic subjects concurrently over two years. At least three subjects must be at the "higher level" (representing about 240 hours total contact time) and the others at the "standard level" (about 150 hours contact time). One subject must be chosen from each of five groups: first language, second language, individuals and societies, experimental sciences, and mathematics and computer science. The sixth subject may be chosen either from the arts or as a second subject from the five other groups. In addition, the program includes compulsory core components, including the Theory of Knowledge (TOK, about 100 hours), an extended essay of 4,000 words, and Creativity, Action, Service (CAS, a minimum of 150 hours).

The IB Diploma Programme offers a balance between knowledge of academic subjects and reflection by the student on issues where that knowledge touches his or her life. The key to this balance lies in the relationship between the academic subjects and the core components: TOK, the extended essay, and CAS. The core components bring coherence and meaning to the academic subjects in response to the age-old complaint that academic study has no relevance to the modern world. For example, the TOK component:

challenges students and their teachers to reflect critically on diverse ways of knowing and areas of knowledge and to consider the role which knowledge plays in a global society. It encourages students to become aware
of themselves as thinkers, to become aware of the complexity of knowledge, and to recognise the need to act responsibly in an increasingly interconnected world. (IBO 1999, p. 3)

One question, for example, on which students are asked to reflect is, "what beliefs or knowledge, if any, are independent of culture?" That is a question that lies at the very heart of international education.

CAS, which requires the diploma students to undertake creative and physical activities and to perform service to others:

takes seriously the importance of life outside the world of scholarship, providing a counterbalance to the academic self-absorption some students may feel within a demanding school curriculum. The creative, physical and social development of human beings can be shaped by their own experiences. Participation in CAS encourages students to share their energies and special talents while developing awareness, concern and the ability to work cooperatively with others. (IBO 2001, p. 3)

The third core component, the extended essay, offers the opportunity to investigate a topic of special interest and acquaints students with the independent research and writing skills expected at a university.

The student is required to take IB examinations in each academic subject, with some moderated teacher assessments in most subjects. The exams are graded on a scale of one to seven points. TOK and the extended essay may be jointly awarded up to three more points, making a maximum of 45 points for the diploma. To

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receive the diploma, a minimum score of 24 points is required. Many students choose not to study the full diploma and take separate subject certificates instead, an option that has encouraged the program's rapid development in the United States.

The IBO has kept in step with other important curriculum developments. For example, UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century published *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996), known as the Delors Report after the commission's chairman and former European Union Commissioner Jacques Delors. The report identifies four pillars of an appropriate curriculum for the 21st Century:

1. Learning to know: by combining a broad general knowledge with a limited opportunity to work in depth.
2. Learning to do: by becoming competent to deal with situations and work in teams.
3. Learning to live together: by developing an understanding of other people, an appreciation of interdependence, and a respect for the values of pluralism.
4. Learning to be: by fully developing one's personality and acting with autonomy through memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities, and communication skills.

In addition, Howard Gardner recently proposed the following components of a modern curriculum. Today's children, he says, need to be able to:
• Understand the global.
• Think analytically and creatively within disciplines.
• Tackle problems and issues that do not respect disciplinary boundaries.
• Know of and interact civilly and productively with individuals from quite different backgrounds.
• Know of and respect their own cultural traditions.
• Foster hybrid or blended identities across cultural boundaries.
• Foster tolerance (Gardner 2004).

There are strong similarities between these proposals and the IBO curriculum. Among the goals they share are the ability to analyze a problem from a range of different perspectives, the capacity to tackle new learning with confidence and competence, the acceptance of the responsibilities of citizenship, and the ability to live and work within a context of human diversity.

The Middle Years and Primary Years Programmes

In 1994 the IBO took over the development of a Middle Years Programme (MYP), designed for students aged between 12 and 16 years. In 1997 it developed a Primary Years Programme (PYP) for kindergarten to age 11. These programs enabled the IBO to offer schools the prospect of a distinctive education experience from early childhood to school graduation. The IBO’s combination of programs, assessment, professional development, and research made it the leading player in the rapidly developing field of international education.
In contrast to the Diploma Programme, neither the MYP nor the PYP was created as the answer to a specific practical problem. Instead, each was born out of the confidence acquired from the success of the diploma program and the conviction that the experience of all children in the period of compulsory education could be more relevant, more motivating, and more appropriate to the challenges of globalization.

The Middle Years Programme, like the Diploma Programme, emphasizes the study of disciplines, of which eight have been identified: the student's best language, a second language, humanities, technology, mathematics, the arts, sciences, and physical education. However, the program's distinctive feature is the five "areas of interaction," which provide a framework of learning and allow important connections to be made between the disciplines. These are called approaches to learning, community and service, *homo faber*, environment and health, and social education. The areas of interaction are not taught as separate disciplines but are used as a means of exploring the different subjects.

Like students in the Diploma Programme, students in the MYP acquire well-researched, well-tested, and well-respected knowledge. They are required to explore the connections between the different kinds of knowledge and to apply that experience to relevant situations. The program culminates with a personal project in which the student is expected to demonstrate sustained involvement with the five areas of interaction. Three fundamental concepts underpin the development of the program: holistic learning, intercultural awareness, and
communication. The MYP has no external examinations, but it does offer external moderation by the IBO of the teachers’ own assessments, leading to the award of a record of achievement and a certificate.

The subject matter of the Primary Years Programme is contained in six areas: language, social studies, mathematics, arts, science and technology, and personal, social, and physical education. The expectations in each area are described in “scope and sequence” documents that are flexible enough to enable schools to adapt to different national or local curricular requirements. The subject material is united through the application of six transdisciplinary themes: who we are, where we are in time and place, how we express ourselves, how the world works, how we organize ourselves, and sharing the planet. The program is based explicitly on the belief that young learners construct models of understanding based on personal experience and make connections between this experience and the incremental pieces of new information they encounter. Teachers are encouraged to work in teams to plan and review a tightly structured learning experience based on units of enquiry.

Within the PYP subject areas, children acquire the knowledge and skills that define the discipline of that subject. Within the transdisciplinary themes, they acquire and apply a set of wider skills: social, communication, thinking, research, and self-management. These skills enable them to transfer their learning from the classroom to their lives at home and in the wider world.
The IB in the USA

In 1975, IB North America (IBNA) was established in New York. The first attempts to introduce the IB into prestigious private schools and community colleges on the East and West coasts were frustrating. However, public schools soon became interested in the program. By 1980 the United States accounted for about 65% of all IB diploma schools. Today the figure for North America is 45%, not because of a lessening of interest in the United States but because of growth in IBO's other three regions (Africa / Europe / Middle East has grown to 31%, Asia-Pacific 11%, and Latin America 13%).

The interest of U.S. public schools in the IB Diploma Programme probably was due less to an interest in international education and more to the need for a high-quality program designed to meet world standards. The IB Diploma Programme combined the academic with the progressive. It met international standards and, unlike the Advanced Placement Program (AP), was structured around a set of clearly articulated values.

Bradley Richardson, regional director for IBNA, described the response of U.S. public schools to the IB during the education reform movement of the 1980s.
*A Nation at Risk* sparked a search among public school administrators and district superintendents for structure, rigour and accountability, and that brought many American public schools to the IB. That the "International" was also part of the International Baccalaureate didn't always figure into a school's decision at that time to take up the diploma program. Schools were at first more eager to demonstrate to their communities a commitment to a well-rounded, superior secondary education than to provide global perspectives to their students. In time, however, schools did come to appreciate a curriculum and an orientation that invited national students to consider their places in the world. In the intervening 20 years, U.S. public high schools have increasingly recognized the importance of that perspective. (Richardson 2003, p. 4)

As a reform strategy, the IB Diploma Programme had an obvious limitation. The program lasts just two years and comes at the end of the student's school experience. Any significant reform would need to address the students' earlier schooling, beginning in the elementary years. The Middle Years and Primary Years Programmes have addressed that limitation.

The IB has received national support in the United States. In October 2003 the U.S. Department of Education awarded a $1.2 million grant to the IBO in order to implement the Middle Years Programme in schools in Arizona, Massachusetts, and New York. These schools are to become "feeder schools" for the diploma program in low-income school districts. And on 4 March 2004 Education Secretary Rod Paige issued a press release that said:
President Bush has proposed to more than double funding for the Advanced Placement (AP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. These programs all share the common goal of increasing rigor of programs of study and thereby preparing students for success after graduation.

Unfortunately, this support was met with virulent criticism of the IB from many conservatives. For example, George Archibald wrote in the 19 January 2004 Washington Times that “The Bush administration has begun issuing grants to help spread a United Nations-sponsored school program that aims to become a ‘universal curriculum’ for teaching global citizenship, peace studies and the equality of world cultures.” The main thrust of the article — that the IBO is closely tied to the UN and UNESCO — is simply wrong; but some of the article was well researched, and the IBO was invited to contribute to its preparation.

Similarly, Nancy Salvato, in an article titled “Further Left Than Multiculturalism?” wrote:

What we here in the United States can do is to make sure that our country, which is a beacon of freedom to the world, continues to ensure the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness for which we are beholden. That means to demand of our own educational system an assurance that our students will learn what it means to be American, not what the United Nations thinks it should mean.

Many of these conservative critics made the mistaken link between the IBO and the United Nations. During
that time, there was considerable tension between the United Nations and the Bush Administration over the Iraq War, and the IB became a popular target for conservatives. Several conservative columnists, such as Henry Lamb and Thomas Sowell, quoted "Jeanne Geiger, an outspoken critic of the program in Reston, Va.":

Administrators do not tell you that the current IB program for ages 3 through grade 12 promotes socialism, disarmament, radical environmentalism and moral relativism, while attempting to undermine Christian religious values and national sovereignty. (Lamb 2004)

It was not easy to decide how to reply to these attacks, which were unique to the United States. After much discussion, it was decided not to reply from Geneva, which would further inflame the UN/internationalism debate, but to encourage local replies.

Despite this criticism, mainstream political opinion in the United States remains strongly supportive of the IBO programs; and 520 schools in the United States, mostly in the public system, are now offering an IB program.

Interestingly, most U.S. schools that adopted these programs did so not because of the programs' internationalism but for their academic rigor. From the start, the IB diploma had to set high standards to satisfy an ambitious group of professional parents whose children had their sights set on Yale, Oxford, and the Sorbonne. What emerged was one of the toughest pre-university courses in the world. As a result, the program was widely hailed by U.S. colleges and universities for the uncompromising academic standards that it set.
However, these programs are, at heart, programs of international education. They are not intended to destroy the students' native cultures and values but to help students lift their sights beyond their own borders.
The Future of the IBO

It has been suggested that the International Baccalaureate Organization is entering its third phase of development. After an initial "heroic period," which depended heavily on the commitment of a group of visionary volunteers and pioneering schools, the rapid growth of the organization led to a "professional period" during which more sophisticated administrative structures were established in response to its worldwide responsibilities for three programs of international education. Now, at the beginning of a new century, the IBO is well placed to enjoy a "period of influence."

The IBO already has influenced the design of a number of national education programs, particularly by sharing features of the core components of the diploma program: theory of knowledge, the extended essay, and creativity, action, service. Currently the IBO is working with several governments in Africa, Europe, and Asia. For example, the government of Japan is introducing "comprehensive studies" into its national curriculum. This is an interdisciplinary subject aimed at helping students think for themselves, make decisions independently, solve problems, and engage in community ser-
vice. The overlap with the IB's theory of knowledge and approaches to learning is obvious, and financial support from the Shinsei Bank has made possible collaboration between the IBO and the National Institute for Educational Policy Research in Tokyo.

The IBO also is contributing to a government project in Casablanca, with shared funding from the Banque Wafa du Maroc. This project will evaluate the Primary Years Programme as a vehicle for the reform of Morocco's state primary education. Discussions also have taken place with the Education Ministry in Vilnius about a Lithuanian variant of the IB Diploma Programme and with the British government about an English Diploma.

Managing future growth has become an urgent priority, and this will be associated with alternative models of delivery. With this in mind, a major study is being conducted of the distance delivery of the diploma program between two schools in Finland, and a substantial investment has been made by the Goldman Sachs Foundation for developing an online support and training facility for teachers, known as the online curriculum centre.

The IBO's double-digit annual growth has been driven almost entirely by demand. Now the organization, with pro bono support from McKinsey, is refining its criteria for deciding where in the world, and with what kinds of schools, it is likely to make the biggest impact.

In this era of globalization, national systems of education no longer can ignore the rest of the world. International education is not just the education of the future. Instead, it is an idea whose time already has come.
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