

Proposal for a Multicultural High School Complex on the Old Ambassador Hotel Site

A proposal to develop the Ambassador Hotel site into an educational complex that will not only address the education of Los Angeles' diverse ethnic population, but will also serve to revitalize the economic reality of the Mid-Wilshire community.

History of the French Lycée System

With the advent of N.A.T.O. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), after World War II, all the constituent members of N.A.T.O. sent contingents of their nationals to France to provide the infrastructure for the new N.A.T.O. organization. Since these people brought their families with them, the concern arose as to how they would maintain their children's education in their native cultures (language and social institutions), while integrating them into French society for what in many cases would be a long-term posting away from their country of origin.

What S.H.A.P.E.(the administrative control of N.A.T.O.) came up with was the concept of what would become the structure of the Lycée International(International High School):

Each nationality represented in N.A.T.O. would have an educational section director, either appointed by the Minister of Education of the country of origin or by the members of a parent association. In turn, the directors of each national section would be under the French administration of the Lycée International, which consisted of a Provisor (Principal) and an Intendant (Business Administrator). It was also determined that unlike any other schools in France, which usually depended on their city or region, the Lycée International would be directly under the aegis of the French Minister of Education. This was seen as a way to raise the Lycée International above local partisan political considerations.

The apportionment of time at the Lycée International would consist of two half-days a week, where the children of each national section would be schooled in their native language and culture. The other four days a week, the students of all sections would be mixed in the traditional French educational system, where they would all follow the same traditional French school curriculum appropriate to their grade level.

Since the French had their own national agenda for this Lycée International, they required that 50% of each section be citizens of the national section they wanted to be part of. This was done to give a preference to French foreign service civil servants that were returning to France from overseas assignments. This would allow a French national returning from let's say an assignment in Japan, the ability for their children to maintain native level language and cultural institution skills of that country. In the future, this would supply candidates for the French foreign service and multinational companies that need a continual source of bilingual and bicultural French nationals to implement France's economic and political agenda overseas. However, it should be noted that mixed marriages and families with no French nationals have always been

accommodated in the various national sections and the 50% French citizenship requirement has never precluded other that sought to be a part of an given national section.

Under Charles De Gaulle, France decided to leave N.A.T.O., but the key role that the Lycée International had come to play meant that it would remain a viable educational program. Today, there are 12 national sections (German, Spanish, Scandinavian, Dutch, American, Italian, British, Japanese etc.) that predominantly serves the needs of the multinational corporations' employees stationed in the Paris region (there are also Lycée Internationals in other French cities where there are large multinational communities).

It should also be noted that the French Lycée system is an all inclusive pre-kindergarten through high school. While such an all inclusive educational model works well in France and might succeed to fully utilize the Ambassador Hotel site, there is no reason that the French Lycée system could not be modified to be exclusively high school if that is deemed to be desirable here in Los Angeles.

It is also worth noting that the French Lycée system has both public and private sections. What this means is that sections like the German, Spanish, and Italian are paid for by their respective governments, even though they are in France. This might offer a source of financing here in Los Angeles for a similar educational system. On the other hand, many of the sections in the French Lycée system are private sections, where the funds are provided by parent associations. Whether a mixed public/private school could exist under our legal system is a question that also must be addressed.

And finally, large Los Angeles populations (like African Americans), that do not have a common foreign linguistic and cultural heritage, could be incorporated into all the other national sections represented.

BENEFITS

Why is the French Lycée International model specifically applicable to a Los Angeles reality and why would the Ambassador site be the best location to implement this plan?

- Developing the Ambassador Hotel site into a multicultural learning center is advisable because of the hotel's central location in the Mid Wilshire district of Los Angeles. This central location offers a neutral neighborhood, close to Korean, Latino, Russian, Iranian, and African American communities that would focus all the diverse cultural elements of Los Angeles into a reinfusion of culture and tolerance into the central city.
- In addition to the educational goals that would be addressed by this project, bringing large groups of people into the Mid Wilshire area would have an enormously positive affect on the present depressed economic reality of the Mid Wilshire area, since it would give the existing businesses in the area the benefits of people being drawn to the area from all over the city for educational reasons, but at the same time shopping, eating, and supporting services in the Mid Wilshire area where their children were now going to school -- a true sense of community would develop around the school.

- It would provide the elite cadres in the target communities that would supply the missing social structures in underachieving ethnic groups in the greater Los Angeles area. This in turn would indirectly address the violence in these communities that has filled the vacuum that exists when community institutions are not developed.
- By restructuring the existing Ambassador Hotel into a Lycée International high school complex, Los Angeles would develop the maturity of maintaining its architectural heritage as opposed to demolishing it for a generic commercial center of questionable value in an area that is already saturated with under-utilized commercial centers.

PROPOSAL FOR A MULTICULTURAL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL ON THE AMBASSADOR HOTEL SITE

INTRODUCTION

The following is a proposal to develop the Ambassador Hotel site into an educational complex that will more effectively address the education of Los Angeles' diverse ethnic populations, while at the same time serving to economically revitalize the Mid-Wilshire community.

Developing the Ambassador Hotel site into a multicultural American learning center is advisable because of the hotel's central location in the Mid-Wilshire district of Los Angeles. This central location offers a neutral neighborhood, close to Korean, Latino, Filipino, Pacific Islander, Vietnamese, Russian, Iranian, and Black communities that would focus all the diverse cultural elements of Los Angeles into a re-infusion of culture and tolerance in the central city.

In addition to the educational goals that would be addressed by this project, bringing large groups of people into the Mid-Wilshire area would have an enormously positive affect on the depressed economic present reality of the Mid-Wilshire area, since it would give the existing businesses in the area the benefits of people being drawn to the area from all over the city for educational reasons, but at the same time shopping, eating, and supporting businesses that offer goods and services in the Mid-Wilshire area where their children were now going to school.

The International School would continually produce culturally sensitive student cadres for certain communities by supplying the linguistic and culturally based social structures that are significantly diminished in low achieving ethnic groups in the greater Los Angeles area. This in turn would indirectly address the violence in these communities that has filled the vacuum that exists when community institutions are not developed. The infusion of varied minority groups into all represented national sections could not help but encourage a higher level of educational achievement in these communities, while at the same time build bridges of mutual understanding.

Restructuring the existing Ambassador Hotel into an International School complex would develop the social maturity in Los Angeles of maintaining our architectural heritage as opposed to demolishing it in favor of a generic commercial center of questionable value in an area that is already saturated with under-utilized commercial space.

Since inner-city life exists in a reality that knows little of the world beyond its borders and is distrustful of anything that challenges its known reality, the new model of education must tempt the curiosity of inherently intelligent students that have gone for too long under the present educational system without reaching their academic potential.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

I propose an International School model (pre-kindergarten through 12th grade) on the present 23-acre Ambassador Hotel site, that proactively confronts the presently low level of English language literacy that is endemic in a significant number of our Los Angeles schools.

Much of the model I propose is derived from the Lycée International, which has existed in France, since the end of the Second World War. What I have attempted to do here is modify that proven and functioning educational system to take into account the different social and cultural realities presented in a Los Angeles context.

Pedagogic Approach

The general idea of an international school is to use a dual immersion approach to education that contemporaneously teaches students their native language and culture of origin, while at the same time integrating these students into a standard-English based American society. At the same time, this program will seek to meaningfully integrate significant segments of Los Angeles' minority students into this International School. The foundational premise of this approach is that language and culture once mastered in any linguistic milieu are freely translatable into any other.

The international school actually consists of two schools, or a school within a school, where students receive a traditional American education for four days a week in classes that are a mix of all component national sections. Subsequently, the student body of the regular school would divide into separate national sections (Mexican, Iranian, Filipino, Russian, Korean, etc.) for two half-days a week, where they are educated in their national section native language and culture of origin.

These national sections will be comprised of:

- 1.** Students from the foreign country;
- 2.** Students whose ancestors came from the foreign country;
- 3.** Students whose families have lived and/or worked in the foreign country for significant periods of time;

4. American students who have no cultural or linguistic tie to the foreign country, other than a desire to become fluent in the language and institutions of that country.

Exclusively American students that enter any of the national sections will do so in order to broaden their intellectual horizons by making them aware of realities outside of their own communities. The inevitable process of comparing this new frame of reference to their own will allow them to think of themselves in less absolute terms, which will give them the opportunity to grow intellectually by increasing their life perspective.

It is anticipated that there will be a significant period of transition for exclusively American students, until they are represented at every grade level in the national sections. This will be necessitated by the reality that the only logical point of insertion for purely American students, without background in a foreign language and culture, is in the pre-kindergarten through 1st grade (prior to 6 years of age).

In an attempt to shorten this period of transition, LAUSD and the national sections might try sponsoring summer total immersion programs in the country of origin. Countries like Israel, France, Mexico, and other countries already have such programs that might develop the requisite fluency for acceptance into a national section at the International School of Los Angeles.

Special English

In recognition of a potential lack of linguistic fluency in standard English of both foreign and American born students, all students seeking admission to the International school would be given an appropriate grade level examination to see if a sufficient ability in English language skills exists to fully benefit from the International School program.

If the requisite level does not exist, a provisional acceptance to the International School would be given. These provisional students would fall in two categories: students who have enough level in English to follow the regular school and nation section programs, while receiving supplemental full Special English instruction and those students that would follow full immersion Special English courses in all subject matter areas in lieu of the regular school, while continuing to attend the national section classes.

What would make these Special English classes different than the standard, non-competitive, classes in which too many African American and Latino kids lose their self-esteem, is the reality that recently arrived students of generally higher socio-economic origins would also be taking the "Special English" course. These students would naturally look to African American and Latino students to translate the American cultural idiom for the foreign born students -- this would give prestige and pride to American kids taking "Special English."

After one year, "Special English" students would either join the regular program or receive a second year of "Special English," if the level is still not sufficient to allow success in the regular International School. It should also be noted that a greater commitment of time for some students taking Special English might be required if they are competent to follow national section classes, the regular school classes and Special English.

Admission to National Sections

A prerequisite for admission to the regular school shall be admission to one of the national sections. 60% of admissions to any national section shall be reserved for students who are citizens of the country represented by the national section or who have appropriate grade level fluency necessary to sustain the foreign language and cultural environment of the national section.

While some of these students might be dual nationals, having American citizenship as well as citizenship of the foreign country of origin, such dual citizenship students shall be specifically disqualified from consideration in the 40% of all the spaces in any national section that must be reserved for exclusively American students with no prior connection to the foreign country of origin. The reason for this policy is that the International School has three separate goals:

- 1.** The maintenance of linguistic and cultural literacy in our immigrant population;
- 2.** The maintenance of linguistic and cultural literacy in our native population;
- 3.** The full and meaningful social and economic integration of both immigrant and native populations into a dynamic American society.

This 40% of exclusively American eligibility shall further be divided into two groups of 20% each. The first group of 20% shall be for all exclusively American students, while the second 20% shall be reserved for exclusively American students that come from the lower socio-economic strata. Given the deficiencies that these students have and the disproportionate amount of nurturing that they will require in order to be successful at the International School, 20% is arguably the highest percentage of these disadvantaged students that can be effectively integrated into the program.

Finally, it must be understood that this “60%-20%-20%” formula can only be viewed as the ultimate desired proportional representation of the International School that can only be achieved after an initial transition period. This is anticipated due to the time necessary to develop a linguistically fluent exclusively American student population, that must first move through the twelve grade levels of the school before they will attain their full representation in the International School population.

National Sections Represented at the International School

In order for a specific national section to be represented at the International School, a non-profit organization charter must be obtained from the State of California in conjunction with the Los Angeles Unified School District. The national section charter shall also set forth by-laws that will be agreed upon by the parent stakeholders of the national sections. In addition to the charter, the aforementioned by-laws shall be subject to approval by the appropriate authorities at the State of California and LAUSD.

There shall be two types of national sections: national sections that are partially subsidized by the country of origin and national sections that are exclusively a part of the existing public school structure in California. The State Board of Education and LAUSD shall have the final authority under which status a national section shall exist.

Each national section will have a board of directors that will be chosen by the parent stakeholders of the national section, the board of directors will then choose the director subject to approval by the LAUSD. The directors of all sections shall be under the Principal of the International School, who shall be an employee of LAUSD.

Teachers of the national sections must qualify under both California credentialing regulations and under the regulations in force in the country of origin of the national section for which they work. This will allow students in the national sections to have their class work count under both California and foreign educational systems. Wherever possible, foreign teachers from the country of origin shall be given emergency credentialing where there are no qualified and credentialed teachers in California.

With over 100 languages actively spoken in California schools, all languages will not be represented at the International School. The following factors will be used to determine which national sections shall be represented at the International School:

1. How many students within LAUSD are from this country of origin;
2. Is there a parent support group willing to take on an active role in promoting this national section;
3. Are there enough students from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade to ensure at least one class at each grade level for this national section.

The International School will only have national sections for the countries of origin that succeed to the greatest extent in fulfilling these three criteria. In any case, LAUSD will make the final decision as to which national sections will exist at the redeveloped Ambassador Hotel site.

It is anticipated that this model of dual immersion education will be implemented at other appropriate ethnically diverse sites throughout California.

International School Administration

International School will have a School Director and three separate principals that will administer the pre-kindergarten/elementary school, the junior high school, and the high school. The responsibility of these administrators will be to run their respective regular schools within the International School structure and to oversee the functioning of the national sections that will have their own directors and administration.

CONCLUSION

In order for our educational system to succeed in a context of insular minority populations, our basic model of education must be restructured to nurture these minority cultures. If we succeed in this ambitious endeavor, the result will be an American culture that is revitalized by the same ethnic diversity that has always been the greatest source of our creativity as a people.

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