

Fostering Global-Mindedness in Teacher Preparation

Gail Zahn, Elizabeth Sandell, and Caryn Lindsay
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Teacher education programs require attention to the rapid changes in the world, in part because populations are becoming increasingly diverse. These rapidly changing classroom environments have prompted a need to train teachers who can communicate with and teach students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. In addition, they must have an understanding of cultural family values and practices which influence individual students among the various ethnic populations they teach. This paper will describe steps taken by one College of Education to create international partnerships and learning experiences in an effort to enhance their teacher training programs and develop an environment of global-mindedness.

In the winter of 2007, faculty members from the College of Education at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) traveled to Magadan, Russia, to sign an agreement with Northern International University. One of the many tenets of this agreement was to share a program of mutual training of students in Pedagogy and Teacher Education. This agreement was a significant milestone in the College's implementation of its strategic plan to increase global-mindedness through the advancement of international programs for students and faculty within the MSU College of Education. This article discusses the process and rationale for the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategic action plan to enhance the quality and quantity of international learning opportunities.

Rationale for International Experiences in Teacher Preparation

Teacher education programs require attention to the rapid changes in the world, in part because populations are becoming increasingly diverse. Cultural and linguistic differences in student populations have historically been a challenge unique to teachers working in urban centers. Today, however, teachers in most rural and traditionally homogeneous schools are faced with the challenges of working with increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. In one school district in southern Minnesota, for example, 19% of the students are from homes with a primary language other than English. Families in these homes represent 16 different languages (Minnesota Department of Education, 2006). These rapidly changing classroom environments have prompted a need to train teachers who can communicate with and teach students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Although there is still a need to address those issues related to often overlooked sub-cultures, particularly those related to poverty, teacher education programs must now address competencies related to intercultural communication and limited English proficiency. In addition, they must have an

understanding of cultural family values and practices which influence individual students among the various ethnic populations they teach (Miller & Fuller, 2006).

International education experiences have long been regarded as one means to prepare undergraduate students to participate in a world with increased ethnic and cultural diversity (Zorn, 1996). According to Walton (2002), enhanced international perspectives, or "global-mindedness," has a direct effect on a teacher's classroom communication skills and, by inference, student learning. There are at least three primary areas in which international education is considered to have an impact: intellectual development, international perspectives, and personal development (Kauffman, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Researchers have long documented the positive changes impacting U. S. college students participating in international education opportunities, including (a) increased intellectual development, including gains in acquisition of a second language (Akande & Slawson, 2000; DeDee & Stewart, 2003; Freed, 1995; Opper, Teichler, & Carlson, 1990; Whalen, 1996); (b) enhanced international perspectives, such as increased understanding of cultural differences (DeDee & Stewart, 2003; Dwyer & Peters, 2006; Opper, Teichler, & Carlson, 1990; Standeven, 1988; Zorn, 1996); and, (c) personal development and transformation, such as increased self-confidence and maturity in decision-making (Akande & Slawson, 2000; DeDee & Stewart, 2003; Dwyer & Peters, 2006; Standeven, 1988; Zorn, 1996).

In the 2003-2004 academic year, 191,231 American students studied abroad. This was an increase of over nine percent from the year before. Of these, 7,918 were majoring in education (Institute of International Education, 2006). For many teacher education programs, however, state licensure standards and national accreditation expectations often require rigid program expectations which can frequently limit opportunities for education majors to take advantage of international study within their major. Additionally, cost of travel as well as college credit which may be associated with international

study programs can limit such opportunities to only select students.

Mankato State University, Mankato's Commitment to Global Education

In 2004, Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) included within its strategic priorities a goal to increase international opportunities for students and to increase international student participation on campus. To address this strategic priority, the International Programs Advisory Committee (IPAC) was formed at MSU. The IPAC collected data from faculty and students on a number of issues related to international and study abroad programs to direct their activities. An action plan was then developed with consideration given to preferred study abroad locations of MSU Mankato students, the representation of various countries among international student populations, travel expenses, and foreign languages taught at MSU (International Programs Advisory Committee, 2006).

The following principles were established to guide the IPAC plan:

- To build on the competencies and interests of the faculty and staff.
- To develop a presence on every continent.
- To develop and pursue collegial partnerships with international scholars.

The MSU Mankato strategic plan encouraged work groups throughout the university to research potential partner universities, discuss program opportunities, and advise on how available funds should be used to develop the partnerships. Faculty members in the College of Education, in particular, embraced the strategic plan and created priorities that would foster the global-mindedness of pre-service teachers.

The College of Education's Priority to Enhance Global-mindedness in Teacher Education

The College of Education addressed the University's strategic priorities through an existing International Studies Committee (ISC) with membership from each academic department in the college, as well as representatives from the student teaching office, the affiliated lab pre-school, and student interest groups. Although the College adopted the MSU's IPAC principles, there was a consensus that a greater focus on issues related to teacher preparation was needed to enhance basic travel opportunities. Furthermore, the ISC maintained that partnerships developed with universities in other countries would, if possible, include experiential opportunities for students in local schools and communities. Student teaching and

practicum exchanges for students would always be at the forefront of any partnerships.

Building on Competencies and Interests

To address this priority, the ISC surveyed the past and current international initiatives among faculty members of the College of Education. Each department was surveyed and ISC members considered these responses. The ISC found that there had been a history of occasional study tours available through the College. These were typically based on individual faculty interest and initiative. It was clear that a more strategic approach was necessary to maximize our potential for international initiatives.

For example, several faculty members had long-time partnerships with colleagues in Thailand. These partnerships, however, had yet to yield any formal plan or to include students in travel or exchange possibilities. The partnerships had primarily centered on delegations of school teachers visiting from Thailand and small numbers of select MSU faculty visiting public schools in Thailand. Although some students may prefer experiences in more familiar cultural environments, Thailand could and would offer a very different global experience for students and faculty members with more adventurous spirits.

In addition to the College's existing relationship with Thailand, a new relationship was being forged with a university and a community in Russia. During the past two years, two faculty members and one undergraduate student had visited Magadan, Russia, with the purpose of getting acquainted, establishing relationships, and discussing partnership possibilities. This developing relationship, as well as the presence of a growing eastern European immigrant population in Minnesota, made Russia an excellent choice for future travel and study experiences.

Developing a Presence on Every Continent

As an attempt to make the best use of limited College resources, the ISC was directed to prioritize its initial focus for international initiatives to three or four countries. Although this prioritizing of international sites to maximize resources was necessary, the actual prioritization proved to be a difficult task. Personal preferences, as well as existing and past international relationships all became determining factors. Additionally, the ISC felt it was important to offer students a continuum of experiences to choose from; location, culture, and linguistic differences were all taken into account. The committee understood that each individual student has preferences, interests, and needs that will influence his/her desire and ability to travel. A preliminary student interest survey was completed in 2006 (Sandell, 2007). It revealed a strong

student interest in travel experiences to Australia as well as Mexico.

The ISC wanted also to carefully consider the teacher training needs of major stakeholders, such as public schools in southern Minnesota. The data showed, for example, that Minnesota schools are seeing increasing Hispanic populations in rural and urban schools. Therefore, it was felt that travel opportunities to Latin American countries should be a priority. Ultimately, the decision to prioritize countries was based on the following factors: existing cultural presents in the public schools, existing relationships and partnerships within the college of Education, student travel interest, and diversity of travel experiences.

Finally, the ISC selected the following countries as the focus of college resources: Thailand, Russia, Mexico, and Australia. Thailand and Russia were selected because of existing and expanding partnerships. Mexico was selected because of the increased Hispanic population in Minnesota schools; also, its proximity to the continental United States offers convenient learning and travel opportunities. Australia was singled out not only because of student interest, but because the lack of a language barrier and the similarities of cultures would make it possible for students to take advantage of a variety of student teaching experiences that are readily available in Australia.

Developing Relationships with International Scholars

Faculty in the College of Education are participating in current initiatives that will focus in specific universities and communities in these four priority countries. Descriptions of these initiatives follow.

Magadan, Russian Federation. In March of 2007, two representatives from MSU, Mankato's College of Education traveled to Russia to complete the signing of a partnership agreement with the School of Pedagogy of the Northern International University (NIU) in Magadan. The agreement includes specific language about the development of joint programs for training students in pedagogy and teacher education as well as the coordination of joint research programs in pedagogy and early childhood psychology. University colleagues are discussing common training modules about, for example, the history of kindergarten throughout the world or the implementation of ACEI's Global Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care in the 21st Century (ACEI, 2007). Colleagues from NIU have been invited to visit the MSU, Mankato campus during the Fall of 2007 to teach classes, as well as to tour and speak at area schools. Plans are now underway for a student delegation from the College to

travel to Russia in 2008. Faculty members from both institutions will present together at the world conference for the Association for Childhood Education International in Moscow, Russia in June, 2008.

Wollongong, Australia. Representatives from the College's Offices of Student Teaching and of Clinical and Field Experience traveled to Australia in the spring of 2007 to visit with faculty from the College of Education, University of Wollongong, to lay the ground work for student exchanges and student teaching experiences.

Chiang Mai, Thailand. The College of Education's partnership with colleagues in Thailand remains strong. Plans are underway to enhance the current relationship to include student and faculty exchange programs. Faculty from the College of Education traveled to Thailand in the summer of 2007 to formalize partnership agreements addressing student exchanges with the University of Chiang Mai.

Mexico. There are a number of University-wide initiatives related to study abroad groups to Mexico. In the future, the College of Education intends to expand on current initiatives and formalize relationships with universities and school districts in Mexico to provide pre-service activities for students. Initial conversations are being held with several specific universities in Mexico.

Future Directions

The new directions brought by a more focused, strategic approach to international initiatives are clearly producing positive change in MSU, Mankato's College of Education. There is, however, a great deal of work ahead. The College has just begun to institutionalize its commitment to enhancing global-mindedness. As faculty members build relationships and discover commonalities and differences, they can collaboratively create ways to share knowledge, research, and experiences that would benefit both faculty and students.

Although the College faculty members have made the choice to prioritize resources by spotlighting a few countries, the focus does not prevent travel or international initiatives from being undertaken in other locations. In the future, college faculty members hope to give students many and more diverse international opportunities for travel, student exchanges, and clinical and student teaching experiences.

The MSU International Strategic Plan focuses not only on the need for globalization through increased travel experiences but also through an international presence in online course registration. As part of the College's international initiative, planning is underway to launch opportunities to expand online offerings internationally. As a first step, online discussion boards

will be encouraged as part of existing and future international partnerships as well as online travel journals that can open a window into international activities for all students. E-learning partnerships will be considered as ways to continue sharing expertise, possibly even providing opportunities for collaborative research projects with international partners. E-learning initiatives can also lay the ground work for new international travel and on-site learning experiences.

Clearly the development of a strategic plan has given much needed direction to the goal of increasing global-mindedness in the College of Education. Three international partnerships were developed in 2007 alone. The work that lies ahead will take full advantage of those partnerships and to provide MSU's students with exciting and meaningful international opportunities.

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DR. GAIL D. ZAHN is an Associate Professor and Department Chair in the Department of Special Education at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota. She is a former public school teacher and administrator. She earned her doctorate in 1997 from Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. She can be reached at gail.zahn@mnsu.edu.

DR. ELIZABETH J. SANDELL is an Assistant Professor and Department Chair in the Department of Educational Studies: Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota. She is a former public school administrator, parent educator, and early childhood teacher. Her doctorate was earned at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in 1991 in Curriculum and Instruction: Early Childhood Education. She can be reached at elizabeth.sandell@mnsu.edu.

CARYN E. LINDSAY is Director of International Programs in the International Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota. She is working on her doctorate in Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She is a former Foreign Service Officer with the United States Information Agency and has lived in Chile, Germany, Italy, and Kosovo. She can be reached at caryn.lindsay@mnsu.edu.