

Expanding Global Possibilities and Increasing the Intercultural Understandings of Teaching Candidates

Dr. Tammy M. Milby
Education Department

University of Richmond / Virginia, USA

ABSTRACT

Global perspectives and international partnerships provide valuable insight for students and educators. Recent inquiries examined the many practices used in teacher education, including student teaching, global literacy clinics, and diverse school placements. Exploration of how university faculty provide experiential learning and integrate internationally focused literacy experiences across various global contexts is crucial. Embedding international experiences throughout teacher preparation programs enhances teacher development by strengthening personal and professional attributes. Educators gain greater cultural competence and establish enhanced teacher identity. How are education programs responding as the world continues to be inextricably tied? This essay describes an action-oriented approach to expanding international possibilities and broadening the intercultural understanding of teaching candidates.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

What does quality teaching look like from a global perspective? There is an impetus at many universities to provide learning experiences for students that broaden their global understanding, provide language learning opportunities and strengthen intercultural awareness. The need for these types of programs is particularly evident in teacher education, where novice educators are often thrust into classrooms with limited lived experience in diverse environments. Both pre-service and in-service classroom teachers face classroom environments rich with multilingual learners from around the world. Broadening perspectives and providing opportunities to participate in global society enhances teaching practice and provides valuable cultural experiences. What does it mean to become a more “cosmopolitan educator” (Luke, 2008)? Luke (2008) describes how increasingly globalized relationships and responsibilities influence the field of education and teaching. Cosmopolitan educators may be more open to new ideas and develop greater respect and awareness as they interact with others (Stornaiduolo & Nicols, 2018).

Teaching candidates often describe how international experiences enhance both personal and professional learning. Teacher educators need to encourage and increase, richer, deeper, sustained clinical-based experiences within programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006). As we prepare teachers, we are preparing educators who will need to exist and thrive in a more global society. Studies indicate that participation in study abroad programs is important for developing educators.

Teachers gain cultural awareness and a better global understanding when they have opportunities to participate in international experiences (Rhodes & Milby, 2016). Pre-service teachers have more confidence in classroom management, are more competent and learn how to handle difficult situations following international teaching experiences (Kabilan, 2013). Kabilan (2013) also describes increases in confidence and competence. Pre-service teachers gain skills while abroad as they apply to learn and devise solutions to participate in decision-making across settings. Developing intercultural competencies is crucial for effective interactions with individuals of different cultural backgrounds at home and abroad. Romijn et al. (2020a) found that guided reflection and enactment were pivotal elements that led to changes in intercultural competencies. Diversity-related beliefs were also positively related to intercultural teaching and classroom practices (Romijn et al., 2020b).

DISCUSSION

Faculty members who prepare in-service and pre-service teachers may seek opportunities to enhance clinical or field experiences to incorporate further diverse perspectives. These perspectives help to expand candidates' cultural awareness. The focus of this essay is to provide an action-oriented approach to expanding international possibilities and broadening the understanding of teaching candidates working with a variety of learners within the classroom setting.

Five possibilities for educator preparation programs are described including both local and global techniques. Following each category, a reflection question is posed for inquiry and consideration.

1. *Broaden the Scope of Curriculum Work*

At almost every university, an ongoing conversation surrounds what belongs within the curriculum and how much emphasis is placed on varying subject matters or experiences. In teacher education departments, licensure regulations imposed by states or education departments are often rule-orientated and prescriptive related to the content that must be covered in education courses. Faculty often speak of the need for teaching candidates to be better prepared for the diverse students they will inspire in the classroom, but often global opportunities can be overlooked by faculty. Embedding a framework throughout courses which explores global perspectives and prepares teachers to work effectively with multilingual and diverse learners may expand. Broadly considering educational issues from social, cultural, political and historical contexts provides for critical thinking. How comprehensive is the focus of the curriculum and is it representative of our complex world?

2. *Reconsider Student Teaching and Practicum Placements*

Internship and practicum experiences (including the semester long traditional student teaching) are often designed by placing a novice teacher with an experienced mentor who can scaffold the teaching candidate along in professional dispositions and pedagogical work.

Faculty often look to diversify placement locations, enhance mentor training, and better support university supervisors who oversee such programs. Incorporating international perspectives within internships at home or abroad can support candidates as they build an understanding of cultural competencies. How are faculty providing a global lens and preparing teaching candidates to be ready for the multilingual learners who enrich our classrooms?

3. *Engage in Thoughtful and ‘Grand’ Global Conversations*

As different teaching practices are modeled and explored in teacher preparation programs, discussion is often at the heart of many university classes. Professors analyze and study the strengths and opportunities of different texts, teaching styles, and classroom interactions. Often programs seek to broaden this experience by looking outside their own country to learn from other educational systems around the globe. International comparisons can help educators think about ‘other ways of being’ and support thinking about worldwide educational approaches, avoiding an “us or them” approach and seeking new knowledge to unify and learn from each other (Hollier, 2018). Conversations about norms and innovations can open doors to new ideas and increase creativity. How are we encouraging future teachers to participate in thoughtful global discussions?

4. *Analyze Practical Experiences and Connection Opportunities during Study Abroad*

Many universities have expanded policies to allow for more students to participate in experiences abroad.

For example, at my university, special emphasis is placed on a promise which ensures all students can travel abroad while enrolled in an undergraduate major. This exciting prospect allows education majors to “step away” from their universities and explore the educational context abroad. Students can make the most of this opportunity by visiting schools in a host country, volunteering in a different setting and observing other approaches to education. Partnerships between the host and home institutions also provide valuable potential. Are faculty or mentors from the home institutions connecting with candidates abroad to strengthen critical thinking and intercultural competencies and make powerful learning connections?

5. *Utilize and Expand Existing Writing Opportunities*

Many academic majors offer some honors thesis, capstone/cumulative course or paper, and dissertation project designed to allow students to excel as they demonstrate program accomplishments or end-of-course learning. This type of writing assignment typically includes synthesizing important learning goals or reviewing the literature on a particular topic. It is also likely that reflections on growth across time or the learning that occurred on the subject matter focus are included. These projects are another place within existing teacher preparation programs to consider expanding multiple viewpoints. Writing that connects to the larger world or considers classroom diversity can easily be incorporated into course assignments or larger writing projects. How can enriching international experiences be part of writing projects or capstone experiences?

CONCLUSION

How can we internationalize teacher preparation?

Educators have a powerful opportunity to participate in global experiences through teacher preparation programs. Building personal and professional attributes, including confidence, self-efficacy, problem-solving, cultural awareness, and expanded teaching techniques, will lead to more talented teachers in the classroom.

Examining assignments, curriculum, and fieldwork while engaging in meaningful and critical conversations can be a starting point for expanding the knowledge and expertise of teachers in the classroom. As educators develop global possibilities and build intercultural understandings, faculty can explore exciting new learning opportunities and perspectives.

REFERENCES

- Cushner, K., & Mahon, J. (2002). Overseas student teaching: Affecting personal, professional, and global competencies in an age of globalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(1), 44-58.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hollier, D. R. (2018). Are We Finished Yet? Teacher Preparation and the Rise of “Globalization.” *Journal of Education*, 198(2), 127-135.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022057418807427>
- Luke A. (2008) Introductory Essay (Curriculum in Context). In M He, F Connelly & J Phillion, *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction*, Sage Publications, pp. 145-150.
- Rhodes, J. & Milby, T. (2016), *Advancing Teacher Education and Curriculum Development through Study Abroad Programs*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global
- Romijn, B. R., Slot, P. L., & Leseman, P. P. M. (2020a). Increasing teachers’ intercultural competences in teacher preparation programs and through professional development: A review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 98(2), [103236].

REFERENCES

Romijn, B. R., Slot, P. L., Leseman, P. P. M., & Pagani, V. (2020b). Teachers' self-efficacy and intercultural classroom practices in diverse classroom contexts: A cross-national comparison. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 79, 58-70.

Stornaiuolo, A., & Nichols, T. Cosmopolitanism and Education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Retrieved 2 Apr. 2023, from <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-252>.