

Chapter 3

Experiential Learning in International Classrooms: A Model for Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the development, design, implementation, and impact of an international initial field experience for preservice teachers. Strategies for initiating opportunities for similar models, extending the experience into student teaching, and the value of inter-institutional collaboration are also delineated.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Internet Hall of Fame (n.d.), the development of the internet is attributed to a computer scientist who conceptualized the idea of an “intergalactic computing network” (n.p.) in 1963. Joseph Carol Robnett Licklider dreamed of a future where computers helped humans accomplish tasks that had yet to be imagined. The Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) conducted the research and development which ultimately spread computer-to-computer communication across the United States. At that time, the intent was to connect government agencies, universities, and the military to coordinate and speed up communication. When Tim Berners-Lee of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) followed with the development the World Wide Web graphical user interface web browser in the early 1990’s, inexpensive access to products, human resources, and research from around the world became open to average citizens with a computer and access to the internet. Licklider’s concept for an “intergalactic computing network” and Berners-Lee’s graphical user interface initiated globalization in earnest (Leiner, Cerf, Clark, Kahn, Kleinrock, Lynch, Postet, Roberts, & Wolff, n.d.). Cross-cultural human interaction took a great leap forward and forever changed the way commerce, communication, and education transpire around the planet. As globalization of business and industry naturally require human interaction with people from different cultures who speak different languages and have different perspectives, a need to prepare a citizenry to take advantage of business opportuni-

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ties at the global level creates a need to educate bright, young Americans to develop as full participants in a world where international engagement is an integral component of a robust national economy. The objective of this chapter is to present the need for preservice teacher international engagement during their initial preparation coursework to develop skills in cross-cultural communication and global education and to describe the impact of a summer international study program on the growth and development of participants.

BACKGROUND

Global competence is becoming a new education initiative, and preparing young Americans for a globalized future emerges as a new and vital component of American education. Academics, state and government agencies, as well as business and education consortia have attempted to outline strategies to promote this national agenda and establish guidelines, benchmarks, and descriptions of what curriculum designed to prepare PK-12 students for a 21st century global economy might include. For example, the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) policy statement on international education outlines five challenges the current American education system faces to prepare citizens for full participation in a globalized society. This policy statement, now over ten years old, reveals that one of the five challenges is "Our teachers are not sufficiently supported and trained in 21st century skills and global content" (CCSSO, 2004). More recently, Zhao (2012) asserted that the "Cold War" curriculum of the past is no longer relevant and new economies call for students to develop skills and dispositions that are different from those needed by previous generations. Critical dispositions for full participation in a globalized world include recognizing and valuing intercultural competence and the appreciation of global cultures and global language acquisition. In particular, students should learn to recognize the similarities and differences of global and domestic cultures to help them understand that no one culture is superior to another, and to appreciate that all humans share similar needs, hopes, and aspirations regardless of race, class or creed. This culturally enhanced curriculum is inherent in Zhao's call for an end to a "Cold War" curriculum that focuses on test-driven assessment of student progress on limited content (2012). A successfully functioning global economy depends on a culturally competent and globally aware workforce that is prepared to adjust to the needs of a robust and flexible economy driven by innovation, entrepreneurship, and international engagement.

Classroom teachers may now find themselves on the front lines of this charge. U.S. PK-12 classroom teachers must be prepared to integrate activities and experiences that enhance students' understanding and awareness of global geography, geo-political interactions, and international cultures in a way that helps students develop their ability to appreciate the similarities and differences of people from around the world and to respect their languages, beliefs, lifestyles, and cultures. This shift away from a "Cold War", test-based mentality in public education begins in teacher education programs. The value and importance of teacher education in this era of rapid globalization is both critical and inestimable as teachers have the power to change the perception of life and work in the 21st century and prepare students with the skills and dispositions for full participation in a global economy. The question then becomes how to ensure all teachers develop a 21st century world-view as well as the skills and capacities to share their awareness and understanding with the students in their classrooms. Overseas engagement is the obvious answer, but may present challenges for many in-service and preservice teachers because of the costs and available opportunities.

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