

Chapter 38

Virtual Activities to Promote Multiculturalism and Sustainability of International Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a report on the findings of a study to measure the effects of virtual activities for promoting diversity/multiculturalism and sustaining international partnerships in science teacher education between the America and Korea. Partnership program website and international workshop are the virtual activities in this study to ensure continued collaboration between two countries. Journal and survey with the science teacher candidates, assessment methods the teacher candidates developed for their students, and the number of international partnership programs between two countries are the data resources in this study. Findings indicate that 1) the American and Korean teacher candidates learn diverse knowledge for teaching science after the virtual international activities; 2) they show more consideration on multicultural/diversity aspects as future global science teachers; and 3) these activities continuously improve international relationships between two countries.

INTRODUCTION

As the society is moving towards a future where globally networked university systems will be needed to meet rapidly increasing demand in research and education, the international partnerships between universities anticipate this need and deliver both universities important benefits, such as development of multiple perspectives, consideration of multiple meanings and provision of collaboration opportunities for international teaching and research.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7305-0.ch038

In the past two decades, the international partnerships and activities in education dramatically expanded in volume, scope, and complexity (Altbach & Knight, 2007). International partnerships in the higher education institutions offer students to see and experience culture and education around the World. These activities range from traditional study-abroad programs, which provide opportunities for students to learn about other cultures by allowing access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand. Other activities emphasize upgrading the international perspectives and skills of students, enhancing foreign language programs, and providing cross-cultural understanding and competence. Of those, the international internship programs in education and teaching have been developed specifically to foster pre-service teachers see and experience curriculum in intercultural settings, providing them insights that could assist in their future classroom and with colleagues.

The international internship programs in education provide opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge and instructional skills on the multicultural level. Through the internship programs, the pre-service teachers interact with individuals from another country and learn more about the other country's educational systems and culture. Early childhood pre- and in-service teachers from the United States and Sweden visited each other's countries, took coursework, and completed an independent study course (Carlson & Stenmalm-Sjoblom, 1992). In another program developed by Haley (2012), United States ESL (English as a second language) pre- and in-service teachers participated in a 10-week electronic exchange with Chinese EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher education candidates via e-mail and Skype. The results of the international activities with the pre- and in-service teachers showed that they have increased interest in other cultures and developed their own ideas of how to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, their efficacies in teaching were improved after completing the international teacher internship programs. Pre-service teachers showed a significant improvement in their confidence in teaching (Woo et al., 2010). Through the program, the participants experienced Korean culture and education by working together with their paired partners. They developed and taught lessons together as a team and participated together in cultural field trips in weekends and after schools. The international programs provided opportunities for the teacher candidates to expand their perspectives about students and knowledge to teach and increased their self-efficacy and student performance.

The objectives of this chapter are to describe the needs of the international partnerships between the United States (U.S.) of America and other countries, including Korea, to improve teacher education for diverse perspectives in teaching and learning, to introduce a model of international teacher internship program, and to report a study investigating the effect of the virtual activities for improving multiculturalism and sustaining international partnerships in teacher education.

BACKGROUND

International collaboration becomes more critically required in American education system to improve teacher quality and student performance. In the field of science education, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has reported that the American students are less proficient than those of other OECD countries in science performance; in specific, American science achievement in PISA 2012 is about the average of the OECD member countries, and 29th of 65 countries included (NCES, 2012). In addition, recent research conducted by National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2012) shows that only about one third of eighth graders are at or above the science proficiency

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