



INTERNATIONALIZING TEACHER EDUCATION: A U.S. – VIETNAM CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The article uses narrative to describe a teacher education partnership between two universities – one in the U. S. and one in Vietnam. The article discusses the rationale for cross-cultural projects in education and also outlines the in-country experiences of the program directors. The experience of the partners is detailed as a case study for developing international education partnerships. Specific themes include internationalizing education, globalization, teacher education, and cross-cultural partnerships.

Keywords: Teacher education, International education, Program development, Curriculum and instruction, Case study, Cross-cultural partnerships.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been a year since my second visit to Vietnam (with another coming up soon). My initial visit was an investigation as to the possibility of an education partnership when four education professors went to Vietnam on an invitation from several Vietnamese universities regarding possible collaborations in teacher education. I was asked to go because of my international education and cultural studies interests. The experience was exciting and transformative in many ways. Having grown up during the Vietnam War and experiencing the aftermath as many of us did, I had definite ideas and illusions regarding Vietnam. Most were developed with the aid of media and popular culture – Vietnam is a closed society, Communist and anti-American. This really couldn't be further from the truth. It took a trip to Vietnam to open my heart and mind.

I have since spent about 17 days in Vietnam, traveling to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and seeing great sites including Halong Bay and the Mekong River Delta. Many things stuck with me, the glorious food, the welcoming people, the throngs of motorbikes everywhere, the wonderful purchasing opportunities, the countryside. I spend most of each day in meetings with education and university officials – most days at least three different meetings. My real epiphany resulted in this experience – as my stereotypes regarding a closed and restrictive Vietnam were dispelled time and again.

Vietnam is anxious to participate in the globalized world. According to [Minh \(2009\)](#) Vietnam is ripe for international collaborations as needs exist to better all levels of education and economic development. He goes on to say that Vietnam suffers from a variety of issues in sustaining international collaboration including funding, meeting global standards, competition, and development in technology and industry. [Hong \(2009\)](#) supports this assertion and adds that international projects are essential but should be balanced, included ongoing negotiation, and be comprehensive – and that teacher education is one area that can facilitate sustainability.

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Fry (2009) suggests that globalization has ushered in a new era of cross cultural possibilities – especially with regard to education. There is a move from nationalism to internationalism that will compel us to develop collaborative education projects. Albach (2009) reiterates this need and encourages project development among Vietnamese and other universities for what he calls soft power – humane interactions (often in the form of education collaboratives). Friedman has been suggesting these agreements for some years now as stated in Friedman (2007) and Friedman (2008).

2. RATIONALE

Internationalizing teacher education is vital for the world of the 21st century. The onslaught of neoliberalism, corporatization, standardization, testing, and the continuing attack on public education and educators in the guise of educational reform necessitates a local to global context in teacher education. Ongoing issues with equity and social justice tied to race, ethnicity, class, orientation, age, and ability linking to schooling, education, teaching and learning must be addressed. The struggle between unbridled capitalism and democracy warrant these investigations in the 21st century, hopefully leading to advocacy and activism and a transformation of teacher education.

Empowering and emancipating educators and students requires a redesigning of teacher education to demonstrate a truly democratic way of life, to be consistent with the ideals of equity and social justice, to be informed by research that is “educative” (Zeichner, 2009). According to Goodman *et al.* (2012) a “triple consciousness’ based on Freire’s critical consciousness is much needed for equity and social justice in a teaching and learning context. We must model critical multicultural, social justice teacher education (culturally responsive pedagogy), work to transform perspectives of all education, society and its stakeholders, and engage in critical emancipatory research leading to advocacy and activism. We must continually challenge the corporatized, unequal, and essentialist framing of education. Education is both a political and ethical endeavor hoping to facilitate critically active teachers and students anxious to engage in the world. Linking the process to the community and the world provides the context, we all need to understand and advocate for equity and social justice. A critical teacher education that investigates these hard issues locally and globally and facilitates t international partnerships can only lead to empowering educators and students as change agents.

Growing up today is very different than even a decade ago. Today the world truly is a smaller place and we really are part of a global neighborhood. People are instantaneously connected to international events through media, technology, trade, and global issues such as conflict, climate, and socio-economics. Borders do not mean the same as they did just a few years ago. A “globalized” world necessitates international connections, thus challenging traditional conceptions of nationalism, exceptionalism, and hegemony. This article investigates internationalizing of teacher education and suggests that we need to contextualize the issues and investigation of global connections better. The article also suggests there are threats to the public sphere and to emancipatory local to global connections thus requiring critical approaches to social, political, economic and education issues.

Teaching and learning must include education for a global perspective so that students might also become responsible “active” citizens of the world (Tucker and Evans, 1996; Diaz *et al.*, 1999; Chapin, 2003). A critical component of education in general, and social education specifically, is to promote an understanding of diversity at home and abroad: “integrating global realities within an existing school curriculum meets the needs of an ever-changing, ethnically diverse, increasingly interdependent, international community” (Tucker and Evans, 1996). World citizenship requires a global / international education.

Global / international education efforts must begin with an attempt to understand globalization. Globalization can be defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (McLaren, 2006). In turn, critical

research in social education attempts to challenge the unbridled neoliberal hegemony associated with globalization. [Diaz et al. \(1999\)](#) state that globalization:

Refers to the compression of the world and to the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole. This process is ongoing and all of us, young and old, Westerners and non-Westerners, are inescapably involved in it. The compression of the world is real. People witness it in their daily lives, in the foods they eat, in the TV programs they watch, in the cars they drive, in the dresses and costumes, in the people they choose to govern them, and so on (pp. 37-38).

Clearly, globalization is increasingly influential in most aspects of 21st century life. Therefore understanding it through global / international education is imperative. Teacher education must provide opportunities for prospective educators to “develop the appropriate skills to understand and engage in the globalization process and to critically analyze its impact on their lives and the lives of people around them” ([Diaz et al., 1999](#)). Above all teachers need to know how to impact the global system as world citizens and as advocates of a well-grounded position or point of view. This suggests that teachers must acquire both a new knowledge base and a skill set that link to global / international issues.. At its core, global education is really about analyzing the links between cultures and people ([Chapin, 2003](#)) it must be better integrated in all classrooms, and thus critically researched as well.

Rethinking teaching and learning in these ways could provide the opportunity to deepen our understanding and appreciation of others in the world, something essential to our roles and responsibilities as global citizens. Given the global interconnectedness of the world today, the global context must be present. According to [Merryfield \(2008\)](#) teachers and students must develop a global perspective that will emphasize cross-cultural experiential learning and stress commonalities in cultures that transcend diversity.

Increased globalization presents many challenges for societies and the institution of education has a responsibility for addressing these “globalized” issues. Education in general should play a strong role and is enhanced through internationalizing partnerships and projects. In addition, cultural competence, collaboration skills, and an appreciation of global connections can be facilitated through cross-cultural experiences in teacher education, thus translating to the classroom. Many schools, colleges and universities are recognizing the need for global competence and promoting understanding among cultures ([Dan-xia, 2008](#)). In addition, linking multicultural education and global issues is facilitated through meaningful international education projects ([Wells, 2008](#)). James suggests that internationalizing education develops a sense of interconnectedness, empathy, and tolerance, which are much needed in today’s world (2005). Education programs have much work to do to accomplish these ideas. A way to move forward is to share ideas and engage in collaborative internationalizing of the curriculum.

Schools in the United States must provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn about the world: who people are, what they do, and how they live. Students must learn how to get along with all people - within the U.S. and around the world - as responsible citizens of both. Education for civic competence, for responsible national and world citizenship, falls within the domain of social studies instruction and learning. We must rethink teaching and learning so as to enable these ideas. Integrating music, movies, art, and literature focusing on global issues or celebrating global culture offers a great opportunity; thus enabling many opportunities for critical qualitative research projects. Fortunately, increased and improved research on internationalizing is being undertaken at many levels of education. These approaches highlight the need to cultivate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for global and civic awareness and responsibility ([Ochoa-Becker, 2006](#); [Ross, 2006](#); [Loewen, 2007](#)). Additionally, to be engaged, global citizens, students need exposure to multiple literacies and diverse perspectives ([Durham and Kellner, 2005](#); [Giroux, 2006](#); [Silberman-Keller, 2008](#)).

3. THE BACKGROUND

International education used to be a strong suit in our college of education. We have had international teacher education projects with Indonesia and Malaysia as a college and individual faculty have also experienced a variety of international projects in recent years. Unfortunately, differing agendas, the corporatization of the university, a challenge to the original mission of the college and university, a strange conception of scholarship, teaching, and service and a narrow focus regarding the idea of teacher education have all contributed to a move away from international connections. Fortunately, despite the seeming contradictions in all of this, international opportunities make themselves readily available and the university seems poised again to stress international projects.

A grant proposal initiated by IT faculty served as the impetus for this endeavor. Ultimately, the department chair, international education office on campus as well as a Vietnamese faculty member from a system campus supported the project; and we began preparing. We also met with the dean who stated that he supported the project as long as we could connect the project to our research. I have found that direct connections in international projects can only help to facilitate possibilities – without the direct assistance and Vietnamese connections from our Vietnamese colleague the project would never have gotten off the ground. A Vietnamese graduate student also assisted with translations and much more both here and abroad.

We met a few times prior to the trip to plan for the meetings. The general focus was to develop teacher education partnerships offering a 1 + 1 masters program through the university. Prospective students would take half of their masters program at Vietnamese universities and half of their program in residence in the U.S. at our university. The courses offered in Vietnam would be developed by our faculty, but taught by Vietnamese faculty. A masters degree in curriculum and instruction focusing on a variety of specializations would be the end result. This would also open up a variety of other possibilities, including short term training projects, online support, and a variety of grant and research opportunities in international education.

4. THE INITIAL JOURNEY

I am reminded by our Vietnamese assistants that protocol is very important in Vietnam, especially regarding initial meetings proposing collaborative projects. An exchange of business cards and introductions come first. Each group shared the reason for the meeting, then needs and interests. Following the initial information gathering, questions were addressed by both sides. The conversations started very formally but each meeting became informal as it progressed. Often stories related to conversation topics, children, teaching, or teacher education would be shared. Notes were taken for future debriefing and planning. Following each meeting gifts were shared and pictures taken. While we went with no assurances, we left Vietnam with each meeting proving to be valuable and offering possibilities for future projects.

Our primary reason for visiting Hanoi was to make contact with the Vietnam National University (VNU) branch there. Themes emerging from the Hanoi visit indicated a need for masters programs that offered general curriculum and instruction, 2nd language learning / ESL, and teaching English. Questions dealt with syllabi and listing of specific courses for the masters, how courses would be offered, and tuition and other cost issues. A key focus emerging from this meeting is the desire for U.S experiences with internships, school placements, and other links to the local community. Our debriefing resulted in planning to develop a proposal or memo of understanding to offer a program for the Hanoi branch of VNU. The program would be patterned after the initial 1 + 1 proposal discussed earlier, with more creative course offerings, including online, hybrid, and linked courses.

We had meetings at six different universities in Ho Chi Minh City, culminating in our participation in the International Cooperation for Higher Education in Vietnam Conference. Again, each of these meetings focused on discussing possible teacher education collaborative projects. Meetings were held with officials at Open University, UEF, VNU International, Hua Sen, HUFLIT, and VNU Social Science and Humanities.

Of all the universities visited, perhaps Open University has the greatest need as they are only able to service a small percentage of students interested in education. The original proposal morphed somewhat at Open University with their need for undergraduate and graduate teacher education. Possible projects resulting from our conversations include introductory education courses, methods courses, and placements in schools for undergraduates. TESOL is the primary graduate interest at Open University with a 1 + 1 project the ideal. Other possibilities include developing intensive professional development sessions on themes in curriculum and instruction for university faculty and for in-service teachers in Vietnam. They are also interested in talking more about short term student and faculty exchanges.

UEF is interested in a number of teacher education projects with content focused on TESOL / second language learning, English teaching, social sciences, and global / international education. This conversation focused on the process for getting such projects approved by the government – that it can take a minimum of 1 -2 years for a new masters degree to go through the process. A pilot program was suggested that offers 1 – 2 intensive courses on educational foundations, English methods or IT. The idea is for our university faculty to develop the pilot courses and actually travel to Vietnam to offer them as intensive courses with the idea that this would develop into a fully fledged teacher education masters degree whereby Vietnamese students would transfer to the U.S. after completing $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the program in Vietnam.

VNU International is in the process of subsuming VNU School of Education and is also interested in developing a collaborative masters of education degree. Initially the plans might call for faculty development projects to train Vietnamese education faculty in expectations tied to graduate degrees in the U.S. Capacity building in English and teaching English are also needed. Short term projects include courses in IT and pedagogy with longer term agreements focusing on the 1 + 1 or traditional masters of education programs. The initial plan also calls for a cohort of approximately 20 students who will begin the masters program.

Hua Sen University is a private school also interested in a number of projects. This conversation also focused on educating us as to the Vietnamese educational system, particularly at the higher education level. Entrance exams are required and colleges offer 3 year Bachelor degrees and universities offer more traditional 4 year Bachelor degrees. This university was perhaps the most interested in IT and seemed much more aware of the possibilities regarding IT and teacher education. Content of interest include language and culture, general curriculum and instruction, global / international education, and science and technology. They are interested in ongoing teacher education consultation in IT, program development, transitioning to a masters degree, and general curriculum and instruction. Intensive summer programs might be a start with a 1 + 1 program developed a bit later.

HUFLIT is a small private university interested in undergraduate teacher education, particularly in the areas of general curriculum and instruction, history education, global / international education, IT, and English. A particular area of interest is to offer masters and doctoral degrees for faculty – perhaps by developing a cohort agreement with multiple Vietnamese institutions. Once again, the masters students would spend the first year in Vietnam completing courses developed in the U.S., then either transfer to the US the entire second year or take online classes one semester the second year and come to the U.S. their last semester. A variety of workshops, short term seminars and faculty exchanges were being proposed.

5. THE CONFERENCE

We were offered a great opportunity to submit proposals and present at the International Cooperation for Higher Education Conference in Vietnam in conjunction with our initial mission. The one day conference consisted of a variety of presentations on themes such as globalization, internationalization, cooperation, cross border / cross cultural issues, case studies, and issues in collaboration – all focusing on higher education in Vietnam. Papers were presented with translation through ear phones as needed with questions posed at the end of each short presentation.

While teacher education was not the primary focus, it came up time and again as a central issue in addressing globalization and international education issues. Presenters stated time and again that international cooperation in higher education can help address global issues such as gaps between developing and developed nations, brain drain in developing nations, soft vs. hard aid, unbridled capitalism at the expense of democratic movements, and access to basic needs. Obviously, concerns were raised regarding maintaining self identity and development as a nation given international interests coming from the U.S. China, India, Australia, and others. “Americanization” was raised as a particular issue given the influence of our economy and political system in the world. Even international organizations such as the World Trade Organization were questioned as arms of American influence.

Despite the critique regarding “Americanization” and internationalization / globalization, the realization seemed to be that if Vietnam wants to continue to play and develop on the world stage then opening up to competition, commercialism, and consumerism in a balanced way may be necessary. Higher education and teacher education in Vietnam need input from abroad and sustainable development is seen as one major goal from these global collaborations.

It is interesting to note that given increased corporatization of higher education in the U.S. through business model integration and implementation of business terminology, that Vietnam seems to be adapting to the language and model as well. This seems quite strange given the centralization of the political and economic system. Regardless, much like China, there seems to be a “liberalization” (at least regarding the market) in business and education. It is nevertheless encouraging that Vietnamese scholars are serving as critics of the impact of globalization on Vietnam, especially in reference to education.

6. THE PLAN

The hope is that this opportunity is the restarting of a long tradition of international teacher education projects much like previous experience with Indonesia and Malaysia. As a result of the energy and excitement of these initial plans and proposals, we are also discussing ideas and proposals for a Center for International Teacher Education and Technology. In addition, further interest has been expressed by a Asia Education Collaborative that will expand such projects into countries such as China and Taiwan.

The project outlines our generic masters in Curriculum and Instruction degree with five choices in specializations. The 1 + 1 plan calls for 6 courses offered in Vietnam and 6 courses to be offered at the University of Houston. All courses are developed by university faculty with training and support provided to Vietnamese faculty teaching the first 6 courses. The program, which is built upon major strengths in each institution, is designed to prepare teachers and other educators to meet the special demands of individuals working in educational, health, cultural, information technology, and other human service settings.

The joint Master’s Degree consists of twelve graduate courses, including three College of Education core courses, six courses in a specific program area, and three electives. The proposed Master’s Degree is distinctive since half of the program (6 courses) will be offered in Vietnam and half of the program (6 courses) will be offered in the United States on the campus of the University of Houston.

Students may choose to apply for admission to the university during the spring of the first year, and if accepted, will come to the US to complete the second year of coursework in the College of Education. Upon completion of the coursework, a comprehensive exam, and a digital portfolio, students will earn a Master’s of Education Degree with an emphasis in one of the five program areas in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

Students in this program complete the first half of the program (six courses) at the Vietnam University. For the second year of study, students may select one course of study from five programs in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction: (1) Teaching English as a Second Language, (2) Social/Cultural Education, (3) Educational Leadership, (4) Instructional Technology, and (5) Literacy Education.

The program will be reviewed every 3 years. This review will include analysis of number of applications, quality of applicants, number of students enrolled, number of graduates, learning outcomes, and placement of graduates.

The first phase of the degree includes six courses offered on site in Vietnam, during Year 1 of the program. Three courses are offered in the fall semester of the first year, and three courses will be offered in the spring semester of the first year. All of these courses include an emphasis on reading, writing and presenting in English. Student admissions criteria are the same as any student applying for the masters program including a minimum GPA requirement, GRE, bachelors degree, and English proficiency.

For each course taught in Vietnam, faculty members should be proficient in English and have a doctorate in English or a related field for the reading intensive courses and technology proficiency for the technical courses. UH is responsible for ensuring that all faculty teaching in the Program meets the academic standards established by the accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as well as the National Council for the Accreditation of Colleges of Education (NCATE). Professional education faculty teaching in this program has earned doctorates or exceptional expertise, have contemporary professional experiences in school settings at the levels that they supervise, and are meaningfully engaged in related scholarship.

Three of the courses taught in the Vietnam Phase are technical and the other three emphasize reading, writing and presentation (RWP). During the first semester, students will take two technical courses and one RWP course to ease them in the RWP environment. During the second semester, students will take one technical course and two RWP courses. Courses will be designed by university faculty and taught by qualified faculty members in Vietnam and include the following: Principles of Human Learning; Instructional Evaluation ; Curriculum Development; Instructional Design ;Design of Online Educational Resources I; and Global Education: Issues in Cross-Cultural Understandings

The last six courses will follow the same schedule as the first year, with three courses offered in the fall semester of the second year and three more courses offered the spring semester of the second year. Students in the joint program are enrolled in courses on the campus with other graduate students in the College of Education. They also have all of the benefits and privileges of regular full-time graduate students.

7. THE RESULTS

Initial steps involved finalizing all the necessary forms and materials and meeting at least one more time with the university Vietnam liaison and international education staff to hammer out specifics. The Vietnam liaison traveled to Vietnam and met with prospective partners to discuss the proposal with the intention to return with either signed agreements of adaptations to the proposal to negotiate. There were tentative plans for some faculty to return to Vietnam in the next few months to continue discussions, market the plan, and offer short-term professional development workshops to interested parties. The goal was to start the project one year from the signing of the agreements.

As a result of the excitement brewing regarding the Vietnam project an International Education Task Force has been established in the department to coordinate this project and investigate other possibilities. Initially the task force will assist in coordinating current international projects. These projects include Global Classrooms: Model United Nations, China study abroad, China 1 + 1 program, and Latin Americanizing the curriculum through course development and study abroad.

Teacher education programs must internationalize as our society and students are already there. Global perspectives are needed to ensure that teachers provide the context and connections to societal and global issues as they arise, rather than ignoring or dismissing them. [Delgado and Norman \(2008\)](#) suggest that such approaches will only assist prospective teachers achieve voice and act as collaborative agents of change for the world.

The initial trip proved quit fruitful with a partnership developing with Ho Chi Minh City University of Education to offer the 1 + 1 MEd program. We are now in our second cohort of 8 students (16 total thus far), which many more “in the pipeline.” The second Vietnam experience was to assess the program, continue planning and tweaking, and provide professional development for Vietnamese counterparts. An annual visit is in the contract with future possibilities including student and faculty exchanges, other program development, Vietnamese visiting professors, study abroad projects, and various research projects. The third visit is forthcoming and will entail similar activities with additional meeting at other universities.

8. CONCLUSIONS

We live in a world made up of many texts; it is essential that students and educators develop multiple literacies that will facilitate the reading of signs, symbols, and images (texts) of that world. We must develop the critical capacity for “new operational and cultural ‘knowledge’ in order to acquire a global perspective that provides access to new forms of work, civic and private practices in their everyday lives” (Lankshear and Knoble, 2003). Our educational approaches could be the place to enable the critical investigation of meaningful knowledge and issues, debates regarding globalization, and relevant problem-based global education that can provide the context for developing the skills engage in active transformation for social justice. “Reading the world” through context and relevant connections provides the opportunity to apply knowledge and develop skills in critical ways, as Kincheloe (2005) recommends. Responsible global citizenship requires knowledge of “others” in the world, whoever they might be. It also requires the skills to understand and act in the best interest of the majority of the people. The knowledge base should include an understanding of who the other people in the world are, what they do, and where they are. The skill set should include inquiry and critical literacy/thinking skills, leading to activism

Increased globalization not only presents many challenges to the economy, society, politics and culture, but also has important implications for education, and the institution of education has the responsibility for addressing these issues. However, there is an increasing concern that educational systems throughout the world are not adequately preparing students for understanding of the world’s cultures, economies and political relationships (Asia Society, 2001). Educators and students should develop the habit of thinking of global ramifications: Is this in the common good? Will this protect the rights of all people (Merryfield and Wilson, 2005)? To create a positive atmosphere, in which students are encouraged to participate in global discourse and engage in global issues in today’s multicultural society, educators need to, first of all, develop multiple perspectives and understand the experiences and points of view of people different from themselves. Meaningful international education projects can help educators achieve that (Wells, 2008). As James (2005) suggested, internationalizing education can develop a sense of interconnectedness, empathy and tolerance, which are much needed in today’s world. However, though there have been some initiatives of internationalizing teacher education exemplified by the institutions, such as Ohio State University and Stanford University (Roberts, 2007) the undertaking is yet to be given due credits, as it deserves nationwide.

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