

International Perspectives

From the International Perspectives Editor

Editor Anatoli Rapoport

Teacher Exchange as a Means of Social Studies Curriculum Internationalization

Since the term social studies appeared in the early 1900s, citizenship has always been its focal point. Citizenship has been perceived as a nation-related concept that assumes commitment to a particular state. As a result, social studies curricula include materials focused primarily on the knowledge about a specific nation or region. Recent attempts to internationalize social studies curricula, sometimes successful and sometimes not very successful, have been limited to introducing a set of courses that provided students with historical, geographical, or cultural information about the world beyond the students' respective nations. The percentage of high school students in the USA who are taking world history and world geography has risen faster than enrollment in any of social studies classes over the last 15 years (Cavanagh, 2007). The 2005 National Assessment for Academic Progress data demonstrated that 77 percent of high school graduates had taken world history and 31 percent had taken world geography, compared to 21 percent in 1990 (Standish, 2012). The continuing debates about the need for curriculum internationalization and globalization concentrate on the curriculum development and sometimes on pedagogies necessary for implementing international - or global - themed curricula rather than the abilities of social studies teachers to teach these curricula. Yet, social studies teachers' international experience becomes a critical factor in the debates about global citizenship education and the need for students' resocialization. Lack or complete neglect of international experiences among social studies teachers leads to superficial understanding of the importance of the development of global competences among students, neglect to very important themes in citizenship education, or even informal taboo on some critical controversial topics that address sensitive questions of national domestic or international policies and politics. However, research demonstrates that teachers with international experiences make connections across cultures and civilizations and across global issues instead of teaching them separately; international experience encourages social studies teachers to teach more accurately, enthusiastically, and creatively; teachers with international experience in general are committed to passing on their knowledge to students and community (Merryfield, 1998; Wilson, 1984; 1986).

One of the means of gaining international experience is participation in international exchange and training programs. Any international educational exchange program is a complex multi-componential phenomenon that has various social, political and educational aspects. Problems of interpersonal relations within a group, ability to adjust to a new environment, intercultural communication, personal perception of a foreign culture, as well as the ability to introduce your own culture to foreigners, make far from exhaustive list of social issues that educators face if they choose to participate in international exchange programs. The political aspect is traditionally connected with an attitude toward the host country and images and stereotypes that participants have. It also includes a political agenda, i.e. less visible but not less important political motivations and goals, both short-term and long-term, pursued by program developers and organizers. This in turn makes international program participants look like providers of a political agenda in the eyes of their counterparts, although in most cases this perception is erroneous.

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Basically, any educational exchange or training program is a school in miniature with its curriculum, students, instructors, learning and teaching processes and, consequently, a number of inevitable problems related to any educational process. However, international exchange and training programs for educators carry out a very specific function and have to possess a feature that other programs can easily ignore. Such programs that are specifically designed for education practitioners have to be designed with a perspective that the alumni will use the acquired knowledge and skills in direct interaction with other people.

Thus the final results in international exchange programs in social studies education are much less predictable than in international programs for say engineers or farmers. Will new methods and strategies, however progressive they are in one nation, be applicable in the classroom in another nation? Will the exposure of a participant to another culture be beneficial to his or her students and colleagues? Or his or her stay in a foreign system will only make him or her more convinced in the righteousness of the previously obtained stereotypes and prejudices and as a result, will be multiplied through class instruction? Will the program alumni have enough time, patience, resources, and shrewdness to promote the new ideas and experiences in a usually vulnerable and change-resistant school environment? Or the often reported disinterest from the part of colleagues or administration, regardless of the nature of this disinterest, will strengthen ever existing skepticism?

The idea of promoting American interests, values, and ways of life to foreign elite and later to broader circles of general public through exchanges and educational exchanges in particular, has always enjoyed a variety of interpretations. Until 1948 when the *Information and Education Act* (the Smith Mundt Act) passed the Senate, the terms educational exchange and cultural relations had been used interchangeably. The first examples of such cultural education were missionaries in the 19th century who believed that by spreading evangelical Protestantism they were bringing progress to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Those first missions can be considered prototypes of present day educational exchanges because not only did they built schools, offered vocational training, or preached but they also sent representatives of indigenous youth to the United States in the hope that the latter would become providers of American Christian values and democratic ideas upon return to their homelands. (Thompson & Laves, 1963; Bu, 2003). According to the U.S. Bureau of Education, 2, 673 students from 74 countries were enrolled in American universities in 1904 (Bu 2003, p. 18).

The 1930s marked an important step in the development of international educational exchanges. Thompson and Laves (1963) contended that three major factors influenced the advance of international exchanges in the world: (a) advance of science, democracy, and education which accompanied the Industrial Revolution; (b) the growing importance of the support of "common people" to enhance the extension of political democracy; and (c) a pressing popular demand of more open international policy. The additional factor that made the United States government act more aggressively was the reassessment of the role of the United States. A cultural colony had already become a cultural metropolis and had to act accordingly.

The involvement of the government revived discussions about the role and place of exchange programs. There were two divergent views on the place of the governmental programs of cultural and educational relations in the foreign policy of the United States. One camp argued that all programs should be valid in their own right independent of political or economic interests of the government. This tendency was based on the approach used previously by private and religious funds. As it was stated in the resolution of the General Advisory Committee in 1944, "No program of international cultural relations should be an instrument by means of which one people attempts to

impose its ideas or conceptions upon another, or to achieve cultural ascendancy, or to accomplish non-cultural objectives" (Minutes of General Advisory Committee, June 28-29, 1944, pp. 49, 50 quoted in Thomson & Laves, 1963, p. 44). The other side argued that since cultural relations are a part of the nation's foreign policy there was no conceivable way to develop and promote cultural programs that would not be related to general foreign policy. However, the both sides agreed that cultural programs must be mutually acceptable and reciprocally carried out.

Passage of the Smith-Mundt Act revived the pre-war U.S. efforts and established a foundation to promote cultural and educational exchanges abroad. It was in the text of the Act that the term "educational exchange" was first mentioned and used separately from cultural exchange. George V. Allen, Assistant Secretary of State in 1948, called the Smith-Mundt Act "revolutionary," adding that "the real significance of the change which was made in the conduct of our foreign policy is not yet appreciated or even understood by many people" (Quoted in Hixson, 1997, p. 11).

Philip Coombs (1964) called it "ironical" that though the objective stated in the Smith-Mundt Act was "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries," it owed its passage to the new Cold War situation. The situation required more actions aimed at conveying American point of view on various events. When faced with the dilemma of where to direct more money, to educational exchange programs or to information service, the government did not hesitate to leave the former behind (Coombs, 1964). In the wake of President Truman's Campaign of Truth to combat Soviet propaganda, the earlier information policy of giving people a full and fair view of the United States, became more aggressive and hard-hitting. With the Cold War dominance on international scene, educational exchanges were reduced and massively overshadowed by information programs (Thomson & Laves, 1963). Although demands for the exchange program were expanding steadily in the 1950s and early 1960s due to the proliferation of new nations in Africa and Asia, the financial resources did not expand and emphasis shifted to grants and exchanges which could have a quick impact (Coombs, 1964). Educational exchanges suffered not only from curtailed funding but also from bureaucratic changes in the State Department. As a result, dollar appropriations for the exchange program declined from \$16 million in 1951 to less than \$10 million by 1953 and did not recover until 1959. The total of American and foreign grantees fell from more than 7,200 in 1951 to fewer than 4,900 in 1954. Although the number of countries participating in exchange programs rose from 62 (1951) to 97 (1959), they faced a progressively thinner spreading of the limited resources (Coombs, 1964, p. 36).

Nevertheless, the number of educators, particularly social studies teachers, who traveled abroad with exchange missions grew rapidly. The increase of international programs and overseas contacts was caused by continuing attempts to promote values of American democracy on the one hand, and growing understanding of the necessity to educate citizens of the future global community, on the other. The improvement of international understanding in an increasingly interdependent world after the Cold War that had been predicted by many (Freeman Butts, 1963; Graham, 1984) clearly became one of educational imperatives. The exchange of educators and educational practices was one of the most important and effective means for achieving that goal, both in the short run and through its multiplier effect in the long run (Burn, 1980; 1990; Leestma, 1973).

Describing the dramatic impact of short-term international travel on social studies teachers researchers reported that "cross-cultural experience made difference in their teaching" (Wilson, 1983, p. 84), teachers with international experiences make connections across cultures and civilizations and across global issues instead of teaching them separately; they identify historical antecedents to current world issues and problems and link global content to the lives of their students; they also teach tolerance and appreciation of cultural differences (Merryfield, 1994, 2000).

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However, the share of international exchange and training programs for teachers in the whole volume of exchange programs grew slowly. Even the term “educational exchange” implied academic exchange of professors or college level students, leaving secondary education mostly outside of the process (Alsup & Egginton, 2000; Burn, 1990; Richmond & Hawkins, 1988). Nevertheless, the dramatic political changes in the 1980s in the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe resulted in intensifying secondary school exchange programs and training programs that involved social studies educators. New conditions and new leaders needed new approaches to education in general and civic education in particular (Quigley & Hoar, 1997). In new democracies where new educational goals and objectives were inconsistent with outdated approaches, methods and content, the majority of social studies teachers belonged to the “old” generation and could hardly learn to teach differently (Polozhevets, Schechter, & Perlemuter, 1997). Both educators and government officials in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe “have increasingly sought the assistance of American civic education organizations in creating educational programs conducive to the development of responsible and effective citizens in free society” (Quigley & Hoar, 1997). The mid – and late 1990s witnessed an outburst of numerous curricula developed by various centers and universities in the United States specifically for the new democracies (Creddock & Harf, 2004; Hamot, 2003; Leming & Vontz, 1997; Patrick, 1994a, 1994b; Patrick, Vontz, & Metcalf, 2002-2003; Polechova, Valkova, Dostalova, Bahmueller, & Farnbach, 1997; Polozhevets, Schechter, & Perelmutter, 1997; Remy & Strzemieczny, 1997; Ridley, Hidveghi, & Pitts, 1997; Shinew & Fisher, 1997).

The implementation of these curricula required exchange visits to observe methods and classrooms, professional development workshops, and training sessions. Such visits, workshops, programs and seminars eventually resulted in new curricula, new curriculum materials, instructional practices, lessons, units, sustainable partnerships, and publications (Lupoyadov, 2005; Pakhomov & Schechter, 2003; Shinew & Fisher, 1997; Zelentsova, Spensly & Schechter, 2005). The overall positive effect of new programs and curricula on civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions of students was recorded by a number of evaluative and descriptive research (Craddock & Harf, 2004; Kupchan, 2000; Pakhomov, 2002; Patrick, Vontz, & Metcalf, 2002-2003).

It should be admitted that a more skeptical perception of international assistance during the “enchanted era” of the 1990’s (Quigley, 2000; Wedel, 1998) reflected dissatisfaction of the results of exchange programs, disbelief in their sustainability and longevity. “These efforts to assist civil society in Eastern Europe, [wrote Kevin Quigley, 2000], fell far short of their lofty goals” (p. 191). Despite a number of descriptive evidence of teacher exchange programs’ benefits for both visitors and hosts, there is still substantial skepticism among scholars in regard to the goals and potential results of such programs, particularly when social science teachers participate. An attempt to change or implement a new curriculum in a foreign classroom is challenging. The “natural” skepticism caused by teachers’ values and school cultures is complicated by disbelief in the ability of foreign system to help, pride of success and achievements of participants’ educational system, regardless of whether these achievements are real or imaginary, suspicion of hidden self-interests, and, as in the case of the former Soviet republics, “inherited” political and propagandistic prejudices (Burton, 1997; Burton & Robinson, 1999; Muckle & Prozorov, 1996; Stones, 1996).

Yet, after decades of exchange programs in social studies education and thousands of alumni of such programs we do not know much beyond descriptive articles about programs or online success stories. What are the curricular and instructional effects of these programs? How did the program impact social studies teacher’s professional or social position? How often is educational success translated into personal professional success? How sustainable are the outcomes of international

programs for educators? Do programs need to provide opportunities for reciprocal changes? In 1973 Leestma wrote about the lack of understanding of the value of international teacher exchange. Eight years later Hayden (1981) complained that “very little is systematically known about the immediate let alone longer-term educational and personal impact of an international exchange experience” (p. 2). Quite recently, Craddock and Harf (2004) contended that “without research and assessment, those who are involved in both the support and practice of promoting democratic education [through international programs] rely on anecdotal and intuitive analysis to inform their activities and planning” (p. 2). The interest in international and global education in the United States is on the rise and student population becomes increasingly diverse. Learning opportunities, such as international teacher programs, teaching abroad and the perceptions of ‘otherness’ this creates, lead to new perspectives regarding human differences and growing global interdependence and cooperation (Walters, Gardii, & Walters, 2009). Such experiences can rectify misconceptions, reverse stereotypes and significantly contribute to the internationalization of social studies curricula. Due to their origin and development, international exchange and training programs for social studies teachers manifest the multifaceted nature of social studies, serving in many instances as a magnifying glass that enables observers to see success and failures in such aspects of education as international education, intercultural communication, educational reform, to name a few.

New goals and new visions of civic education, growing emphasis on global competences in regard to civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, reconceptualization of the idea of citizenship and its expansion beyond the framework of an individual nation, the ideas of perspective consciousness and multiple loyalties require in-depth internationalization of the whole field of social studies education rather than formal introduction of new courses. Gaining international experience will help social studies teachers develop their own unique reflective understanding of these new challenges. An honest and open discussion about social studies teachers’ participation in international exchanges and intensification of such exchanges will result in the nominal institutionalized internationalization of teacher training to the end of creating globally aware and culturally sensitive social studies educators and students.

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