

Chapter 4

Collaboration Not Competition: International Education Expanding Perspectives on Learning and Workforce Articulation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter documents the development of a program for college faculty, public school teachers, graduate, and undergraduate students to pursue international travel, study, and teaching in Thailand. The program features collaboration among institutions, faculty colleagues, and school personnel focused particularly on science and mathematics education. The chapter reflects on the current methodological perspectives used to compare educational systems and the concomitant outcomes in workforce articulation. Details of expansion, development, and measurement of local, individual, and program success are provided and analyzed using current competitive international models. An alternative view of international relationships as collaborative learning opportunities is proposed.

COLLABORATION NOT COMPETITION: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING AND WORKFORCE ARTICULATION

Findings from a wide range of studies have established the influence of rapidly expanding communication and technological resources which have

resulted in increased contact among systems and organizations on an international scale (OECD, 2012; Friedman, 2006), and for the purposes of this chapter, in the systems practices of higher education (Egron-Polak, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012). In the context of increasing systems interdependence, global expansion in the past half-century has created frequent comparisons of student school achievement in both post-industrial and currently

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developing nations (Schleicher, in Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, & Hopkins, 2010). National and international comparisons have seldom focused on the possible contributions of a collaborative rather than a competitive model for promoting workforce preparation. This chapter argues for the positive learning contributions of a mutually beneficial international study program which takes a broad approach to participation and purpose, involving multiple international institutions, college faculty, K-12 school personnel, college students and K-12 students.

The thrust of the report focuses on programmatic issues which indicate effective educational experiences, but which also infer a revision in the ways success--both programmatic and educational--might be assessed on a global scale. Taking a collaborative stance, the authors establish the benefits for all stakeholders in the program, and provide indicators which project improvements in both intellectual and workforce outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International Comparisons and STEM Education

Typically, U.S. students and many of their teachers have a narrow, if not provincial, view of international experience and of the history and culture of other nations (Sawchuck, 2012). Generally unschooled in a functional knowledge of geography and international issues and politics, and often limited in knowledge about influences of other cultures and contributions of other ethnic and national groups, U.S. schools continue to lag behind others in assuming a global perspective in K-20 schooling, especially where it relates to the global workforce and productivity competition (Benton, Stratton, & Stearns, 2010; Hart, 2008). This limited view of an internationalized curriculum may figure largely in current comparisons of education-to-workforce articulation and must

be examined from national and international perspectives.

Trends in the US: Historically, the U.S. has used competitive language in discussing education initiatives to draw attention to the need for US students to fare better on international measures of knowledge and skills (Clarke, 2009; Feistritzer, 2005). In the 1980s, practice and policies included language from *A Nation at Risk* (US DOE, 1983) a report which called for elected officials, educators, parents, and students to reform the public school system. The authors ominously cautioned that the nation was at risk because of the inadequate quality of American education, and expressed grave concern that a “once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (US DOE, 1983, p. 7). The document indicated the hostile, cold-war competitive stance in U.S.-global relationships, which in the ensuing 30 years has evolved into more inclusive possibilities, despite surviving vestiges of that view.

The subsequent *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) was designed to drive broad gains in student achievement and to hold states and schools more accountable for student progress (U.S. DOE, 2001). This represented significant change in the education landscape, emphasizing annual testing, academic progress, report cards, teacher qualifications, reading first and funding changes. More recently, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 initiated *Race to the Top* (RTTT), competitive awards created to spur innovation and reforms in state and local district K-12 education (US DOE, 2009). States were awarded points for satisfying specified educational policies, such as performance-based standards for teachers and principals, complying with nationwide standards, promoting charter schools and privatization of education, and computerization. States that won the awards must demonstrate that goals were achieved within the four-year window (US DOE, 2009).

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