

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later: An Overseas Student Teaching Project That Is Popular, Successful, and Replicable

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I hope you remember me. I participated in the Overseas Project in the spring of 2001. I just had an impulse to contact you and see how the program was doing. It has made, and still is making, quite an impact on my personal and professional life. I am now entering my 4th year of teaching . . . It's funny, I had originally graduated with intentions on teaching social studies, but I was given a great opportunity to start a new program first in my school (a computer applications class) and then in our district (dealing with computer certifications). I don't think I would have jumped at the chance if I hadn't been involved in the Overseas Project. I owe a lot to the program . . . I took a lot of chances while I taught and traveled in Ireland. Some paid off and some didn't, but the fun and growth in it all was that I took the chances. I have brought that to my teaching, too. In fact, I tell my students almost daily that they need to start taking chances. And most of them do! It's really wonderful how everyday, and I mean everyday, I either do something or say something or see something or even sometimes smell something that reminds me of Ireland or the hard work that went into getting to

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

Ireland. All of that motivates me, and of course, helps me motivate my students to not just dream big, but be big!

—Greg T., Ireland, Spring 2001

Tomorrow is my last day of teaching through the Overseas Project. Thank you so much for your efforts in preparing, supporting, and assessing me through the process. I hope you remember that your work is so worthwhile; you make it possible for hundreds of students to have once-in-a-lifetime experiences that they will never forget. I have always maintained that international friendships build peace one person at a time, but the Overseas Project builds peace hundreds of people at a time! All over the world, people have not only made a connection to IU and to the student teacher, but have hopefully had a positive experience with an American.

—Rachel M., England, Spring 2004

If ever there was a reason for engaging in the kind of work we do—those of us who are teacher educators involved with international field experiences—it is because of communications like the ones above from current and former students. These student teachers go on to become classroom teachers who have had the opportunity to view, participate in, and talk about the world from a different vantage point. They have been shaped and often transformed by their experiences in overseas schools and communities, and they seek to instill in their elementary and secondary pupils an appreciation of, and thirst to learn more about, the larger world of which they are a part. In this post-9/11 society, these are the kinds of teachers we need providing instruction and leadership in our nation's schools, and we look to teacher preparation programs to provide the means for graduating new educators who “think globally.” The Overseas Student Teaching Project, offered through the Cultural Immersion Projects at Indiana University, is one successful model for giving teacher education majors the opportunity to teach and live abroad, and through structured preparatory and on-site requirements, develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to “incorporate a global dimension into their teaching” (Heydl & McCarthy, 2003, p. 3).

International Student Teaching:

Nothing New, But More Is Needed

McKay and Montgomery (1995) reported that “the notion of providing opportunities for students to gain experiences abroad did not greatly influence preservice teacher education until the 1980s” (p. 6), at a time when the teacher education reform efforts sought, in part, to include multicultural and global perspectives in the teacher preparation curriculum (Heydl & McCarthy, 2003). International field experiences, including overseas student teaching, emerged as an important way to expand the worldview of new teachers and bring a needed global perspective to their curriculum development and classroom instruction.

Since then, the impact of international experiences for preservice teachers has been well documented. Wilson (1993), for example, suggested that *gaining a*

global perspective (including “substantive knowledge” and “perceptual understanding”) and *developing self and relationships* (including “personal growth” and “interpersonal connections”) are key outcomes for participants of international experiences (p. 16). McKay and Montgomery (1995) found that student teaching experiences abroad “have the potential to change the way beginning U.S. teachers think about themselves, curriculum design, and teaching strategies” (p. 28). Merryfield (1997) described international field placements as “profound learning experiences that help teachers construct bridges between their students’ lives and the wider world” (p. 10). Willard-Holt (2001) agreed, providing evidence that even experiences of short duration can have positive results and increase the number of preservice educators who are able to engage in international opportunities. She added, “When these preservice teachers then share their learning with their classmates, students, and the community at large, such trips can have far-reaching consequences on the global education of the entire community of learners” (p. 516). Of course, an expanded worldview can be achieved even when student teachers are placed in United States schools and communities that expose them to different cultural groups through cross-cultural experiential learning (Knighten, n.d.). However, Kissock (1997) observed,

By choosing schools in other countries for placements, we add a dynamic to the student teaching experience that can further challenge students’ philosophical positions about education, foster their independence and self-confidence, and offer them the opportunity to view their home country from the perspective of citizens who live outside its borders. (p. 126)

Yet, in spite of the positive reviews given international field experiences, it seems that current practice remains insufficient for preparing worldminded educators capable of incorporating global and cross-cultural elements into their elementary and secondary classrooms. Gaudelli (2003), for example, asserted that “teachers lack global knowledge due to the absence of attention to international study in their own education” (p. 143). Delany-Barmann and Minner (1996) described the dilemma as such:

There have been many demands for curricular and pedagogical reform to prepare preservice teachers to teach from a more global and multicultural perspective. However, these demands often go unmet in teacher training programs. Consequently, many teachers continue to graduate from their preparation programs with limited understanding of multicultural issues and concerns. (p. 37)

In addressing the question, “Why aren’t teachers being prepared to teach for diversity, equity, and global interconnectedness?,” Merryfield (2000, p. 429) explored the impact of “lived experiences” on teachers and teacher educators, engaging in “significant experiences with people different from themselves” (p. 440). When these experiences are combined with critical reflection on the dynamic interplay of identity, culture, and power, people begin to examine issues and events

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

from others' perspectives, thus developing the perspective consciousness that is one of the defining characteristics of a worldminded educator.

Thus, a clear need exists for greater efforts to internationalize teacher education programs in a way that graduates are prepared to infuse a global perspective throughout their elementary and secondary curricula. International student teaching placements remain a powerful way to provide preservice teachers with the "lived experiences" that can contribute to their development as "global educators" (Merryfield, 2002). The purpose of this manuscript is to report on a successful model for overseas student teaching—one that has withstood the test of time, remains highly popular among teacher education candidates, can be replicated on other campuses, and includes a support network of an international education foundation, collaborating U.S. colleges and universities, and school placement consultants the world over.

The Overseas Student Teaching Project at Indiana University-Bloomington

The Cultural Immersion Projects were started in the early 1970s as an optional supplement to conventional student teaching, with the placement of student teachers on the Navajo Indian Reservation through the American Indian Reservation Project. The Overseas Student Teaching Project was added in the mid-1970s to bring an international dimension to cross-cultural field experiences. Following a year-long preparatory phase and a minimum of ten weeks of in-state student teaching, participants engage in eight additional weeks of classroom teaching experience in the primary and secondary schools of Australia, China, Costa Rica, England, India, Ireland, Kenya, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, Spain, and Wales. Plans are underway to add Turkey to the list of host nations in which placements are made. Characterized by a significant academic component and on-site cultural and community involvement, the Overseas Project has provided nearly 2,000 preservice educators with professional experiences in foreign schools while broadening their perspectives on others' ways of thinking, doing, and living. In 2001, the Overseas Project received national recognition as the recipient of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's "Best Practice Award for Global and International Teacher Education." This was followed in 2005 by the Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for "Excellence in International Education."

Theoretical Framework of the Overseas Project

Indiana University has a long history of involvement in the international community, largely through the early efforts of the late Chancellor Herman B. Wells, whose vision and commitment to scholarship and research resulted in the development of a vast network of international programs and global connections that contribute to its world-class reputation today. Within the School of Education, the Overseas Project extends professional preparation through international field

experience featuring a sharply focused study of a particular cultural group through working and living within the host nation school and community.

Recent years have witnessed a reconceptualization of teacher education at Indiana University, resulting in the emergence of six principles designed to undergird effective teacher preparation programs. Applied to the Overseas Project, these principles provide guidance and definition as the Project continues to evolve, ensuring that participants' needs are met and School of Education integrity is maintained. Thus, the Overseas Project seeks to (1) foster a sense of *community* among all parties involved, including participants, project staff, host nation contacts, and Indiana and host nation schools, (2) encourage *critical reflection* on the multiple contexts in which schools function and on international perspectives on social and educational issues, (3) promote lifelong *intellectual, personal, and professional growth* and appreciation of learning, (4) include *meaningful experiences* in placement schools and communities, (5) promote well-grounded content *knowledge and multiple forms of understanding* of what pupils bring to the classroom setting, and (6) provide *personalized learning* allowing participants' interests and values to shape major aspects of their Overseas Project experiences.

Goals of the Overseas Project

Three major goals direct the Overseas Project; they include: (1) developing a broader understanding of the pluralistic world in which we live and of the mutual influence of nation upon nation; (2) providing intercultural teaching and community involvement experiences in overseas nations—experiences which offer realistic, in-depth exposure to other ways of life and schooling; and (3) facilitating professional and personal growth through increased self-confidence and self-esteem, greater adaptability, and acquisition of new and different teaching methods, ideas, and philosophies. The Overseas Project's unofficial motto, "education unites the world," suggests the development of worldminded teachers who are equipped to serve an increasingly diverse population in an increasingly complex world. Additionally, participants are encouraged to develop their own goals—both professional and personal—and to evaluate and revise these goals throughout the preparatory phase and actual in-state and overseas student teaching experiences.

Overseas Project Participants and Organization

Overseas Project participants are typically undergraduates in the Teacher Education Program at Indiana University, although graduate students and certification-only candidates have also applied. Participants have included persons receiving certification in elementary, secondary, and special education, as well as those receiving "all grades" certification in art, music, and physical education. The Overseas Project director and staff strongly believe in raising future teachers' awareness of the world and expanding their international knowledge through structured experiences and focused studies. We believe *every* student teacher

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

should be able to have this opportunity, if he or she so chooses. Therefore, limits are not placed on the number who can participate each year; rather, the Overseas Project is open to all who apply, if they complete the Project's required preparatory phase and meet eligibility standards for student teaching. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in participants, with more than 100 student teaching abroad in the 2004-05 academic year, and more than 130 going on-site in 2005-06.

Program applicants enter the Overseas Project early in the academic year preceding student teaching, typically their junior year, to undergo extensive preparation (including seminars, interviews, readings, abstracts and papers, workshops) for the educational practices and cultural values, beliefs, and lifestyles of the placement sites for which they have applied. These requirements not only familiarize the student teachers with the schools and cultures in which they will be expected to operate, but they also serve as an effective self-screening device in that applicants whose primary motivation may be to play "tourist" are discouraged by the intensive preparatory work.

During the student teaching semester, Overseas Project participants must first teach in-state for a minimum of ten weeks to receive state certification; they then spend at least eight weeks in their host nations, where they are assigned to national primary or secondary schools. Although participants may request to be placed near one another, they are seldom assigned to the same school. Rather, each student is encouraged to approach Project participation as an individual experience, shaped by the student's own objectives and personality as well as by his or her interactions and friendships with host nation people.

While at their sites, Project participants are expected to engage fully in all teacher-related functions of the school; to foster friendships with community people and become involved in their activities; to plan and perform a service learning project in their communities and reflect on the outcomes achieved and insights gained, and to submit weekly, reflective reports identifying local attitudes, cultural values, world and host nation issues, and personal and professional development and related insights. They typically live with host families in the placement community and become an integral part of family life. Such homestay experiences enable the student teachers to interact closely with people at the local level in a wide range of activities—from the ordinary tasks of daily life to special events and traditional ceremonies—and thus learn first-hand about the people and communities from which their school pupils emerge.

In addition to earning their student teaching credit through the Overseas Project, participants also earn a minimum of nine credits at the 500-level (master's) for the academic work completed during the preparatory phase and while on site, and for the cultural immersion experiences achieved through overseas host school, family, and community involvement. Although a few students apply their graduate credits toward the completion of their undergraduate degrees, most choose to "bank" those credits to use as electives later on in a master's program and/or to apply toward incremental salary increases once they have begun teaching.

Relationship with the Foundation for International Education

The IU Overseas Project shares a close relationship with the Foundation for International Education, based in Bay City, Wisconsin. The Foundation secures the actual overseas school placements and provides this service for a number of colleges and universities around the United States. Through the Foundation, the Overseas Project is further linked with nearly 30 placement consultants in the various host nations; these are the individuals who, upon receiving a student's application materials from the Foundation, approach the schools in their service areas to secure an appropriate placement. The consultants typically are, or have been, involved in education in some capacity, whether national or regional education officers, college professors, heads of Teacher Centers, or school principals. The strength of the Overseas Project is tied directly to the efforts of these groups and individuals whose commitment to quality teacher preparation and international linkages drives their work (See Korsgaard, 2005).

The Foundation's network creates a supportive environment for colleges and universities that are seeking to develop international field placement options on their campuses, and those that are looking to expand existing programs. Korsgaard, the Foundation's director, and the collaborating institutions work together to help new programs get off the ground, providing sample materials and information on processes and procedures that have worked well for others. In fact, the IU Overseas Project and Foundation for International Education have further collaborated in bringing together the people involved in overseas student teaching to explore topics in international education and to identify ways in which our programs can be further developed and strengthened. In the spring of 1999, the Overseas Project and Foundation hosted the first-ever International Conference on Overseas Practice Teaching on the Indiana University campus. The conference was attended by placement consultants from eight nations, U.S. campus directors whose overseas school placements are arranged through the Foundation, and a large number of former and current Overseas Project student teachers. A second conference was held in the summer of 2003 at Lancashire College in Chorley, England, and plans are now well underway for the next conference scheduled for August of 2006, to take place once again in the Indiana University School of Education. Those seeking to develop international field placements on their own campuses are welcome to attend and will find rich resources in the array of programs already in place on the various collaborating campuses, and in the host nation consultants who will be in attendance.

**Indications That the Overseas Project
Has Achieved Its Goals**

Over the years, data have been amassed documenting the many outcomes of Overseas Project participation. Data collected by means of student teachers' on-site reports and during supervisory visits have provided support that considerable new

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

learning results from teaching and living abroad, and that the connections fostered with host nation educators, youth, and community members yield new experiences and insights that go far beyond the scope of student teaching alone. Detailed evaluations completed by both student teachers and host nation educators are secured at the conclusion of the overseas experience each semester, and a year later, follow-up surveys are mailed out to former participants to collect information on their professional activities and reflections on the lasting impact the Overseas Project has had on their lives. Practically across the board, these documents confirm that the overseas student teaching and cultural/community involvement experience achieves its stated goals, as well as those of the student teachers and host schools who join in the professional partnership.

In the past six years, a number of reports have emerged from the data collected through the Cultural Projects, resulting in published articles describing the outcomes reported by participants. With topics ranging from youth culture to service learning, the message sent is that professional field experiences abroad, combined with assignments that require community participation and reports that demand critical reflection, result in new learning and related insights that move well beyond the classroom sphere, although which may have significant implications for classroom practice. Synopses of some of four these reports are presented in the sections that follow.

A recent report examined the influence of host nation cultural values on student teachers' classroom practice and community involvement. Following the recommendations of Merryfield (1997), Sleeter and Grant (1999), and McLaughlin (2000) regarding the need for educators to study the diverse cultural values, patterns, and attributes of their pupils, Stachowski, Richardson, and Henderson (2003) examined the written reflections of student teachers on the Navajo Reservation (n=28) and in seven overseas nations (n=60) pertaining to the influence of host culture values, beliefs, and traditions on their classroom practice and community involvement. Among the values they identified were *traditional lifestyle*, *clan/family*, *sharing reciprocity*, *superstitions/taboo*s, *sports/competition*, and *education*. Further, the student teachers described their application of these values in a range of professional, social, and personal ways. Similar to the study summarized above, the combined data demonstrated that cultural study and learning can and should be an integral part of teacher education programs, including the field-based components. By requiring student teachers to examine the values operating in their placement communities and to seek ways in which they can incorporate these values into their own actions, they are learning to become culturally responsive educators who will embrace the diversity in our schools and communities.

In a somewhat different vein, Stachowski and Brantmeier (2002) asked 60 student teachers, 30 each overseas and on the Navajo Reservation, to reflect upon their observations of and encounters with host culture group members and their experiences in overseas and Reservation schools and communities as a way of illuminating their changing perceptions of their "home" culture, which for most of

these students is “mainstream” U.S. culture. For many of these student teachers, this may have been the first time they had been required to examine the factors that contribute to whom and what they are, and the forces of family, ethnicity, community, and nation that shape the ways in which they perceive themselves and those around them. The student teachers reported 278 different changes in their perceptions of “home” as an outcome of their cross-cultural experiences on the Reservation (111) and abroad (151). These changes were then categorized as having either a positive or negative slant, with common themes and interesting differences emerging between the two groups of participants. In essence, the student teachers were encouraged to “see the self through the other,” and in doing so, more fully understood themselves and others through living, teaching, and participating in cultures different from their own. The “perspective consciousness” acquired through a reflective process not only encourages further insight into self, it may also foster keen insight into the “other” and facilitate the development of culturally responsive educators for a culturally diversified global village. Student teaching placements into the schools and communities of the “other” provide invaluable insight for the possibilities of change at home and for a new understanding of those aspects of home that are often taken for granted or assumed to be universal.

A third report focused on student teachers’ exploration of youth culture in their host nations through observation and reflection. As popular youth culture has emerged powerfully around the world, the opportunity and necessity for professional development in this area has become important. Teachers must find ways of mediating the barrage of images and expectations relative to youth culture that their elementary and secondary pupils face on a daily basis, including within the classroom. Stachowski, Visconti, and Dimmett (2000) collected data from U.S. student teachers in overseas schools, regarding their emerging understanding of youth culture in their host nations. Based on careful observation of the children and youth in their classrooms and communities, combined with thoughtful reflection from a cross-cultural, transnational perspective, the 31 participants in this report identified implications for their own teaching behavior in an effort to validate their pupils’ culture and make classroom experiences productive and empowering. Reporting on the influence of U.S. culture, the significance of schooling as both a social outlet and forum for expressing national pride, and the unease with which youth contemplated their futures, the student teachers concluded that an understanding of, appreciation for, and engagement with youth culture were deemed critical to both teacher and pupil empowerment through the development of relevant curricula and classroom spaces in which children can freely and safely express themselves. By recognizing the far-reaching influence of youth culture on the lives of the elementary and secondary pupils they teach, student teachers begin to understand how these influences can be harnessed in the classroom to promote pupils achievement in both their overseas placement sites and schools “back home.”

Another report dealt with service learning in overseas nations. Participants in

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

the Overseas Project are required to plan, perform, and report on a service learning project which takes place in the local placement community with the support of community citizens and/or agencies. In selecting their service learning projects, the student teachers must adhere to the “3 Rs” of *realistic, reflective, and reciprocal*. Stachowski and Visconti (1998) analyzed the written reflections of 60 student teachers who had performed service learning activities that included assisting the elderly, assisting farmers, assisting with church and social functions, helping individuals in their homes, assisting with education-related activities, assisting people with physical and mental disabilities, working in youth and community centers, working with charities, and assisting with community beautification projects, among others. Among the benefits the student teachers gained from their experiences in the community included a greater understanding and appreciation for the nature of other people’s lives, a greater awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, a sense of belonging within their host communities, a positive attitude toward future volunteering, an opportunity to learn things that cannot be learned in a classroom, and a commitment to make service learning a part of the curriculum of their future classrooms.

To build on the outcomes described in the previous synopses, we now turn to freshly gathered data from students in the field. Similar to the previous sections, this new data set provides indicators that the Overseas Project is successful and glimpses into how it can be improved. Each semester, participants in the Cultural Immersion Projects are asked to complete an evaluative survey at the conclusion of their on-site experiences titled, “Participant Evaluation of the Overseas Project.” First and foremost, the survey provides Cultural Projects staff with useful feedback about the quality of the program and practical ways in which it can be improved. In addition, student teachers reflect on their own experiences, providing key insights into the achievement of Project goals. This allows Cultural Projects staff to understand more specifically if the goals are indeed being met.

The following data were collected from 66 of the participants in the Overseas Project during the 04-05 school year. The student teachers reflected on personal, professional, and academic outcomes in their schools, with their host families, and within the placement communities. The intent is to highlight the broad range of outcomes that emerged from the international student teaching experience, and to point to some trends impacting the process.

In terms of *classroom adaptations*, 71% of the student teachers reported no major difficulties in adjusting to their host school classrooms. Where challenges did exist, the student teachers pointed to such differences as philosophical and/or organizational differences (e.g., methodology, routine, curriculum/subject matter, classroom management, and limited resources), culture shock, and feelings of isolation. Many student teachers highlighted strategies they used to overcome these difficulties. Some of these strategies included building from similarities or aspects of familiarity, drawing on their Overseas Project preparation and subject matter/professional

Table 1.
Overview of Student Teacher Responses

Item and Response (N = 66)		
Was it easy for you to adapt to your host nation classroom in terms of classroom organization, subject matter, and methods?	Y=47 (71%)	N=19 (29%)
Do you feel you were adequately prepared for the host nation cultural setting?	Y=55 (85%)	N=10 (15%)
Do you feel that you were aware of the problems, trends, and issues related to the host nation educational scene?	Y=43 (66%)	N=22 (34%)
Did you find that teachers at your school related well to you?	Y=52 (91%)	N=5 (9%)
Do you feel that you were well accepted by the pupils in your classroom?	Y=54 (95%)	N=3 (5%)
Do you feel that you were well accepted by the host nation family or families with whom you lived?	Y=54 (95%)	N=3 (5%)
Do you feel you experienced a sufficient amount of community involvement across the weeks you were overseas?	Y=42 (74%)	N=15 (26%)
When I balance the problems/disadvantages inherent in the Overseas Project against the benefits/advantages, I must say that: 1. Problems/disadvantages benefits far outweigh any benefits; 7. Benefits/advantages far outweigh any problems	Mean = 6.3	

preparation, observing in the host school, fostering open communication with others, nurturing their relationship with supervising teachers, taking initiative to participate in events outside of school, being flexible, and not evaluating things immediately.

Most important, many student teachers summarized their reflections with specific outcomes of adapting to a host nation classroom. Six areas emerged from the data: (1) Participants' nationality promoted cross-cultural understanding for host nation pupils; (2) Exchanging ways of doing things with host nation teachers; (3) Comfort with planning and organizing the day; (4) Enhanced performance in terms of classroom management; (5) Awareness of alternate ways of reaching pupils; and (6) More defined philosophy of teaching and learning.

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

An impressive total of 85% of the student teachers reported feeling *well prepared for their host nation culture*. They were most prepared for cultural differences and the many similarities that they observed between their home and host nations. Aspects that participants were least prepared for included the lingo or local dialect used, and the shock of working so hard at living and teaching. There was a wide range of reported items that helped in preparation for the host nation culture including the Overseas Project preparatory assignments and readings, having realistic expectations, Overseas Project class session activities, personal research, being open, and having a positive outlook.

Although still a majority, fewer student teachers—66%—believed that they were *aware of educational problems, trends, and issues* through preparation, or became aware of them in their host country. Through preparation and lived experience, students gained an awareness and understanding of problems, issues, and school information. Four themes emerged from the survey data. First, students recognized issues facing teachers and that impact the national system of education. Second, participants became cognizant of historical perspectives of education in their host country. Third, students discerned the differences in schools, curricula, and the setup of educational systems. Finally, participants perceived the range of ways to tackle social issues that impact the school (bullying, health, resources, equity, etc.).

An awareness of educational problems, trends, and issues led to several outcomes for the student teachers. Their relationships with the host families, supervising teachers, and other adults in the community were strengthened through relevant conversations on education. They were more aware of the impact the U.S. has on other nations. Finally, they had a deeper understanding of a broad range of educational problems, issues, and trends that are shared cross-culturally.

The preparatory phase of the Overseas Project provides many opportunities for students to learn about the educational problems, trends, and issues in their host country. Classroom discussions, reading and writing assignments, as well as interactions with former participants and individuals from the host nation all supply students with some insight into these questions. However, it does seem from these survey results that student preparation for educational problems, trends, and issues may be limited to broad generalities from the national scene, and that the unique local context brings a detailed picture for which students feel unprepared. This suggests that student preparation could be supplemented with activities that help students become familiar with a process for identifying educational problems, trends, and issues once they are in the local community. For example, students could be asked to keep a journal of problems, trends, and issues that appear in various news sources in their home community during preparation. Further, increased contact with host nationals prior to the immersion experience through an online pen-pal exchange, sustained examination of host nation news sources, and/or the recruitment of host nation student teachers to be placed in nearby local U.S. communities could be beneficial to preparatory students' understanding and overall preparation.

Student teachers also appreciated the opportunity to form *professional relationships with their colleagues at their host nation school*. A total of 91% said that teachers in their host nation schools related to them well, citing factors such as sharing common ground as teachers, friendly and welcoming personalities, inclusion in both professional and social activities, connection to a school insider, and shared interests, all leading to the formation of positive relationships. Host teachers who were more reserved, had different priorities (family, health), or who had strained relationships with other teachers at the host school led to neutral or negative relations.

Not surprising, student teachers rated their *acceptance among host nation pupils* very high, with 95% saying that they were well accepted by the pupils. They identified several reasons for their acceptance, including pupil interest in knowing what life is like in America, openness to interpersonal interactions, and personal stories about family, friends, and school pupils back home. Student teachers also expressed a number of concerns regarding their relationship with the pupils in their host schools. Among these were the challenge of gaining pupils' respect as an authority figure, behavior management, and being too social and relaxed with their pupils at first.

As described earlier, most student teachers lived with families in their placement communities, arranged through their placement schools. A total of 95% of the student teachers reported feeling accepted by their host families. Several positive outcomes emerged through the relationship student teachers formed with their homestay hosts. These included the development of deep friendships, increased local and national knowledge, increased connections within the community, and the feeling of someone looking out for and caring about the student teachers' well being.

Student teachers typically reported somewhat mixed results when asked about *getting involved in the community* beyond their host family, with 74% suggesting that they felt their community participation was sufficient. Most frequently, student teachers said that maintaining an inquisitive and openly interested attitude was a good way to get involved in community life. Some of the benefits they identified included meaningful involvement outside the school context, an active social life, and better knowledge of local life outside of the classroom. It is clear that the student teachers were more than just visitors. In part, their Overseas Project assignments are designed in a way that *require* their participation in their placement communities. Along with the mandatory service learning project, the essay topics on their weekly reports necessitate that student teachers are talking with community people, learning about local issues, and seeking opportunities to become involved in cultural and community events and activities. The student teachers cannot adequately address the topics unless they are getting out and doing these things.

Finally, the student teachers reflected on the major advantages associated with participation in the Overseas Project, including personal and professional growth. When asked to balance the advantages with the disadvantages of participating in the Project, using a scale of 1 (most negative) to 7 (most positive), respondents averaged 6.3 overall, indicating that the "benefits/advantages far outweigh any problems."

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

Students described major outcomes of the Overseas Project in terms of their personal and professional growth. Within the category of *personal growth*, eight categories emerged from student responses: (1) Improved relationships with people; (2) Stepping outside their comfort zones; (3) Increased self-awareness; (4) Increased understanding of other cultures; (5) More savvy world traveler; (6) Growth in confidence; (7) Deeper appreciation of home; and (8) Greater appreciation of multiple perspectives. Within the category of *professional growth*, seven categories emerged from student responses: (1) Comparison of educational systems; (2) Awareness of teaching strengths and weaknesses; (3) Unique teaching experience (increased marketability); (4) Ability to work with a broader type of colleagues; (5) Increased skill developing classroom resources; (6) Rediscovered passion for teaching; and (7) Improved adaptability in the classroom.

It seems clear that the Overseas Project met its three goals during the 04-05 academic year. Student teachers developed a broader understanding of the pluralistic world in which we live and of the mutual influence of nation upon nation. They participated in intercultural teaching and community experiences that were realistic and in-depth. Finally, student teachers experienced personal and professional growth through increased self-confidence, adaptability, and acquisition of new teaching methods, ideas, and philosophies. One of the participants summed up the achievement of these goals in the following reflection:

I love that this stretched me as an educator, but more importantly as a person. I learned a new way of life, a new system of education, and a new people. There were so many struggles I had to deal with even before I got here, and then once I finally did arrive the problems just intensified. I learned a great deal about myself and the necessity for speaking up for myself and dealing with sticky situations with finesse and kindness. I honestly feel like a better-rounded individual; there is so much that you can learn by getting out of your comfort zone and continuously pushing yourself. I am thankful for that lesson.

—Nancy M., New Zealand, Fall 2004

More Than Just Student Teaching:

Community Involvement and Critical Reflection Are Crucial

From the reports highlighted above, it is clear that the Overseas Project requires far more than merely completing a student teaching assignment abroad. Project participants are challenged to explore their placement communities beyond the boundaries of their schools and homestay hosts, to meet diverse people and become involved in local activities and events, and to reflect—through structured reports—on these experiences, seeking meaning and new insights that broaden their perspectives on how others live, think, and do. Zeichner (1996) suggested that most preservice practicum experiences, including student teaching, are narrowly focused on the classroom setting alone, lacking attention to school and community contexts, and consequently “often fail to prepare student teachers for the full scope

of the teacher's role" (p. 216). Brown and Kysilka (2002) echoed this assertion, adding that involvement in the community is a must. For preservice educators, they noted, community participation "provides valuable community background information not available through the typical classroom field experiences" (p. 184). The insights gained when the interplay of classroom, culture, and community factors is explored, reflected upon, and documented, can contribute significantly to the achievement of student teacher learning. Student teachers who are prepared for and placed in culturally "different" schools and communities, and who are required to explore beyond the surface of the "cultural iceberg" (Brown & Kysilka, 2002, p. 69), acquire new learning and related professional and cultural insights that can be applied in *any* classroom setting.

Such exploration and reflection are required of the student teachers placed abroad through the Overseas Project. In addressing questions pertaining to schooling, culture, and life in their overseas placement communities, the student teachers delve below the surface of the "cultural iceberg" to examine "the much larger and less tangible aspects such as beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes" (Brown & Kysilka, 2002, p. 69). Participants reflect on their efforts to interact with and make sense of their host nation culture, on important issues impacting people in their placement communities, on comparative education topics, and on the roles and responsibilities of schools and educators in the community and nation. The reports cited above suggest that a focused study of classroom, cultural, *and* community dynamics, enhances novice educators' understanding of the multiple realities that characterize any professional setting, strengthening their ability to respond effectively to people whose worldviews may differ from their own. Now, plans are being developed to investigate the long-term impact on elementary and secondary classroom teachers who participated in the Overseas Project three or more years prior, to begin to understand the ways in which their international student teaching experiences continue to influence their professional and personal lives.

Suggestions for Program Developers

The Overseas Project indeed represents a realistic model that can be replicated in teacher education programs on other university and college campuses. In existence for thirty years, the Project has survived in part because of the support of the School of Education's administration and financial backing through inclusion in the annual budget of the School. It has evolved and grown to the point where it is today; however, it started out small, with only six countries offered and less than a dozen participants annually in the early years. Still, features of the Project from its infancy are in place even today, and these are, in part, the factors that have contributed to its long-term success. Based on these features, we offer five key suggestions to guide the development and structure of new programs as they emerge.

First, student teachers must *be prepared* for the overseas school setting and

Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

community in which they will be expected to function. They need to have a working knowledge of the host nation's system of education, including information on national or state curriculum, external examinations, and other measures of pupils progress. They also need to possess at least basic information about the social, economic, and cultural forces operating in the host nation, as well as an understanding of the host nation's position in the international arena. We are doing our students *and* their school and homestay hosts a disservice if even a basic preparation is not provided prior to their departure.

A second suggestion is to require *instate student teaching* prior to the overseas placement. This will enable participants to work through many of the challenges and difficulties that typically accompany the student teaching experience. Designing instruction to meet standards, evaluating pupils, managing behavior, long-range planning—student teachers should *first* gain experience and confidence in these and other areas with the support of classroom teachers and supervisors in familiar school settings.

Third, as much as possible, the overseas placement should represent an *individual experience* in which the student teacher stands on his or her own two feet, without the crutch of other U.S. student teachers in the same school or homestay setting and without U.S. campus personnel organizing and overseeing the experience. The next step for our participants is graduation from the university, a teaching license in hand, and their own elementary and secondary classrooms. The overseas placement requires that the student teachers accept personal responsibility in its multiple forms, and to operate as the emerging professionals they are. Unless they are required to do this, they will not be able to effectively assume responsibility for other people's children in their own classrooms.

Fourth, the overseas experience needs to have *structure and focus*. Student teachers should go with specific expectations and responsibilities, as well as requirements for written reflection and processing of new learning. Otherwise, we run the risk that deep meaning and important insights will be lost to superficial exposure to significant events, trends, values, and interactions in both school and community settings. The deliberate, professional and cultural learning that is woven into overseas school and community activities can and does follow the student teacher to subsequent situations, where an awareness of and sensitivity to cultural and/or national differences, where instruction geared to meet the learners' needs based on these differences, and where thoughtful reflection on school and community participation, will contribute to our students' long-term success.

Finally, rather than attempting to reinvent the wheel, program developers should *tap into existing programs* to become a part of a well-organized consortium, such as that represented by the Foundation for International Education, Indiana University and the other collaborating campuses, and the host nation placement consultants the world over. By working together, each of us can do more than we

could individually, and the sharing of resources, ideas, procedures, and connections is indeed priceless.

Conclusion

Many young people come to Indiana University from communities where their international and cross-cultural contexts have been limited, and they often intend to return to these communities to seek teaching positions and settle into lives like those they knew growing up. The Overseas Project provides these teachers-of-tomorrow with the opportunity to leave IU with not just a degree and profession, but also with a more well-rounded and larger scope of the world in which they—and all of their future pupils—live. Through the Overseas Project, more than 2,000 young women and men have closely examined global and international issues, linkages, and dynamics through their preparatory and on-site experiences. Their eyes have been opened to others' beliefs and educational practices—others' ways of thinking, doing, and being. They have stepped outside of their comfort zones and stretched their personal and professional limits in ways conventional student teaching could never achieve. When they enter their own elementary and secondary classrooms, there is a far greater likelihood that they will understand the concepts of “global community” and “interconnectedness,” and that they will know what it is like to be an outsider looking in and finding ways to gain acceptance. Finally, they will have had first-hand experience with the issues involved in dealing with differences in language and culture.

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Thirty Years and 2,000 Student Teachers Later

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