

Moving Toward More Effective and Sustainable Approaches to Global Learning

Brewer, Elizabeth, and Kiran Cunningham, eds. 2010. *Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum: Theory and Practice across the Disciplines*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishers.

Gadsby, Helen, and Andrea Bullivant, eds. 2010. *Global Learning and Sustainable Development*. New York: Routledge.

Slimbach, Richard. 2010. *Becoming World Wise: A Guide to Global Learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishers.

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Within the past decade universities and colleges have been quick to embrace the concept of “global,” which has been channeled through a variety of initiatives intended to foster students’ development as “global citizens” and to enhance “global learning” across the disciplines. At times “global” has seemed little more than a substitution for “international,” with senior-level administrators performing a massive search and replace within Microsoft Word to update the names of campus programs. Also perplexing is that global has been spun as a novel concept, despite the fact that scholars have demonstrated that the world has long been interconnected. Technology has undoubtedly facilitated connections between cultures by permitting instantaneous access to all regions of the globe, yet much evidence exists to confirm that such linkages are not entirely new.¹

Within the field of education abroad, it seems to me that our job is to look beyond the buzz around global initiatives in order to determine what learning actually means for our own programming. Such an endeavor entails finding definitions and practices that permit us to design programs that are both effective and sustainable. While definitions of sustainability abound, here I use sustainability to refer specifically to the role of educators in ensuring that education abroad activities remain vibrant and responsive to institutional needs, and that programming leads to real and enduring change among students. With these objectives in mind, I review three recent books that can assist educators in programming around global learning: *Global Learning and Sustainable Development*, edited by Helen Gadsby and Andrea Bullivant; *Becoming World Wise: A Guide to Global Learning*, by Richard Slimbach; and *Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum: Theory and Practice Across the Disciplines*, edited by Elizabeth Brewer and Kiran Cunningham.

Global Learning and Sustainable Development and *Becoming World Wise* present global learning from the perspective of two different nations and student populations. Written primarily as a guide for secondary school teachers in the United Kingdom, *Global Learning* begins with a useful history of the evolution of the separate, yet increasingly interrelated, concepts of global dimension and sustainable development within the context of British secondary schools, going back to the introduction of issues-based education in the 1960s. This overview reminds readers of the implications that varying definitions of global learning can have for teachers and students who are required to adapt to ever-changing curricula that are influenced by shifting political philosophies and pedagogical theories.

¹ Of many examples, see Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye, “What’s New? What’s Not? (And So What?).” 2000. *Foreign Policy* 118:104–119.

Gadsby and Bullivant borrow their definition of global learning from the Development Education Association (DEA): “[Global learning is] an education that puts learning in a global context, fostering: critical and creative thinking; self-awareness and open-mindedness towards difference; understanding of global issues and power relationships; and optimism and action for a better world,” (2). This definition is intended to be applicable across disciplinary boundaries, as is illustrated in case studies offered in the second half of *Global Learning*. Audrey Beaumont and Nicola Savvides outline, for example, how the theme of trade routes can be explored through a variety of disciplinary lenses (Gadsby and Bullivant 2010, 89). The introduction of cross-curricular themes is designed to enhance learning and help students make sense of a changing world that is increasingly both diverse and interconnected (Gadsby and Bullivant 2010, 168).

In *Becoming World Wise*, Slimbach shifts the focus to college students preparing to study, conduct service, or volunteer abroad. He argues that, “Although the potential for acquiring a truly global education has never been greater, actually achieving it requires more than simply ‘being there.’ Much depends on whether our field experiences are structured in ways that promote meaningful intellectual and intercultural learning,” (Slimbach 2010, 7). Slimbach challenges students to be *not only aware* of cultural differences, yet also to consider *how* they will interact with those whom they come into contact while abroad.

Slimbach’s advice is aimed not just at students traveling to locations such as Florence and Australia where their peers have gained reputations, perhaps unfairly at times, for partying and failing to interact with local culture on a more meaningful level. While it may be easy to assume that the students going to less traditional locations are gaining a more authentic cultural experience, often by enduring extreme climate conditions and witnessing high levels of poverty and inequality, Slimbach points out that it is just as easy for them to leave their program site simply feeling lucky for their own privilege and without becoming more globally aware (Slimbach 2010, 75). He advises students to become more mindful of who actually gains and loses from their presence in the host country, and to find ways of maximizing the gains for those who are often excluded from the benefits of tourism (Slimbach 2010, 85). Mindfulness likewise forces students to live with paradoxes and the feeling of being in more than one world; while not all students may be ready for this sort of ambiguity, those open to new experiences have the opportunity to develop in new and enduring ways.

Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum takes up where Slimbach leaves off. Brewer and Cunningham explain that the purpose of this volume “is to provide examples of how intercultural and transformative learning can contribute to disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, and how these in turn can contribute to intercultural and transformative learning, ...” (Brewer and Cunningham 2010, 8). This mission involves finding strategies for integrating study abroad within the undergraduate curriculum, as well as breaking down the barriers between academic learning and experiential and intercultural learning. Like Slimbach, the authors conclude that merely sending more students abroad does not necessarily translate into true global awareness, a fact that many policymakers and university leaders often overlook while attempting to increase the number of participants on education abroad programs. The authors argue instead that, “it is high-intensity dissonance that under the right conditions leads to transformative learning,” (Brewer and Cunningham 2010, 9).

Like *Global Learning*, *Integrating Study Abroad into the Curriculum* provides a useful set of case studies that illustrate how undergraduate faculty in various disciplines can aid students in becoming more interculturally competent. One successful example is the predeparture credit-bearing courses developed for study abroad students at Beloit College and Kalamazoo

College, which were developed by committees composed of staff and faculty across the disciplines. Also particularly helpful is Darren Kelly's use of mental maps in Dublin, which teach students to "read" a city by using geographical theory and practices. Kelly counteracts the general unwillingness of students to explore certain areas of the city, helping them to discover populations and sites that they might have overlooked. These explorations offer students an intercultural skills toolbox that can be applied to any number of future situations.

From the books reviewed above, it is clear that there is no singular definition for global learning. Readers may use any of the definitions suggested by the authors, or better yet they will recognize the necessity of coming up with definitions that suit their own programmatic needs. It is then up to educators to link the definition to their program's mission, goals, and learning outcomes so that it is possible to assess whether students are actually becoming more globally aware as defined. At the same time, the books reviewed remind readers that producing globally competent students cannot remain the responsibility of education abroad offices alone. It is necessary for faculty and other units on campus to become part of the predeparture, on-site advising, and reentry processes. Without linkages across disciplines and institutional units, true global learning is not possible in any sustainable fashion.