How to Educate Global Citizens? First, Overcome Institutional Barriers…


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If you have ever had the sensation that those asking you to promote international education stand firmly in your way of doing so, you will welcome two important new books to the field. The sources reviewed here deal with the challenges faced by professionals and those who try to promote international education, but will appeal to a wider audience as well. Stearns’ comprehensive survey of international education (he uses the term “global education”) is intended for administrators and professionals in the field, as well as for graduate students with an interest in higher education. It provides an overview of the structure of international education and an outline of some of the current issues facing the field. Lewin’s collection of essays goes into some of these current issues in depth, focusing on education abroad rather than global education as a whole.

The essays edited by Lewin and written by Stearns share a vocabulary and a viewpoint. The concept of global citizenship is something many international educators may idealize without fully understanding. The sources reviewed here remind us of the purpose and meaning behind our work.

The purpose of and need for global education (Stearns), global citizenship education (Davies and Pike 2009), and education abroad (Nolan 2009 and Gore 2009) are asserted strongly and similarly in all of the sources. The world needs global citizens to do the work that will be required in the generation to come. A more interconnected world necessitates the education of a new kind of citizen, one not interested merely in national issues but those of other cultures and
the world as a whole. Stearns asserts that undergraduates lacking an understanding of global issues are “insufficiently prepared for citizenship—American OR global,” (2009, 194). None of these authors treats globalization or international education as a given; each illustrates how the world has changed and what must be done to prepare students. Davies and Pike even discuss the controversy around whether globalization is a real phenomenon. Gore notes the increase in the use of the words “internationalization” and “globalization” on campuses, as well as the increase in student interest in education abroad.

All of these authors note great opposition and challenges to international education and study abroad, despite the growing demand and need for it. They all find this opposition in the mindsets of both faculty and administrators. Gore and Nolan both use the word “marginal” to describe education abroad within higher education institutions. Gore revisits an argument of her 2005 book that the discourse on study abroad within American higher education is born of and perpetuates an image of affluent women participating in frivolous Grand Tour activities (Gore 2005). These authors describe a destructive kind of “national pride” within U.S. higher education: colleges and universities abroad are seen as inferior to U.S. institutions, students are discouraged from study abroad, and faculty are not interested in international academic partnerships.

Davies and Pike describe both ideological and practical oppositions to the practice of global citizenship education, which they see as the coming together of global education and citizenship education. Opponents wonder whether it is desirable for students to identify with peoples all over the earth rather than citizens of their own nations. However, Davies and Pike reinforce the idea of “multiple citizenship,” and suggest that study abroad is a valuable way to encourage responsibility and allegiance to the global community.

What can be done to overcome these challenges and further the goals of international education? Stearns provides a big-picture plan for improving and expanding global education in colleges and universities. He proposes working with primary and secondary schools to prepare students entering college, striving for innovation in global education, and making a commitment to global education at the national and institutional levels. He emphasizes the role of higher education in delivering global education by gathering everyone on campus into the discussion, at all levels of the institution.

Stearns is echoed by the other authors reviewed here who see the vital need for involvement of upper administration, faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. For Gore, this means changing the discourse on education abroad: at the grassroots level, we need to start talking about study abroad in a way that affirms its academic and societal value and does not feed into the stereotypes and dismissive attitudes held by faculty and administrators, and even to a certain degree by education abroad professionals themselves. “The entire higher education community needs to participate in a new dialogue about education abroad,” (Gore 2009, 295). Gore cites a NAFSA report, describing “… a time when study abroad was the province of elite, liberal arts colleges,” (Gore 2009, 293). While this report was intended to promote the democratization of study abroad, Gore contends that “This statement explicitly reinforces the
belief that study abroad was owned by the wealthy and implies a derogatory connection to liberal education,” (ibid). Any study abroad professional can think of an example of one’s own writing and office marketing materials in which the dominant beliefs are unintentionally reinforced.

Thus the recommendations of these five authors span the full range from the global or international level of higher education to the work that study abroad professionals can do to better promote academic integrity. Nolan offers several suggestions for how international education practitioners can effect change at the institutional level, again stressing the importance of involving all stakeholders, including trustees, industry groups and accrediting bodies. He urges proponents of international education to be relentless in their work to change attitudes and policies in their institutions and higher education. Davies and Pike focus on how education abroad can enhance global citizenship education by teaching students about their place in the world.

The strategies discussed here may seem overwhelming to those new to the field or not in an administrative position to enact them. However, the commonalities among these authors are that institutions must work together to effect change, that provincialism and superior attitudes on the part of faculty and administrators are a large source of opposition to international education, and that international education must be about preparing global citizens. As Nolan advocates, we need “…patient, relentless campaigning over an extended period of time,” (2009, 276). If enough of us employ this strategy, the rest may follow.

These new resources for international education are sure to prove useful to practitioners, administrators, and students alike. Stearns may appear to provide a very broad overview, but it also features detailed chapters on curriculum, education abroad, international students, branch campuses, and bureaucratic structure. Lewin’s work will inform research for years to come through specific chapters, but as an entire volume, it is also essential for international education practitioners.

Reference