Educating for Peace: 21st Century Models for Thinking Globally and Acting Locally

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Let's begin with a story. A rabbi gathers his students around him and challenges them with a question: “What is the distance between East and West?” One eager student immediately responds, “Well, it’s a long way for sure—maybe a thousand miles.” “Think it through some more,” the rabbi requests. After a silence, a second student looks at the rabbi and says, “I think the circumference of the earth is about 25,000 miles, so that means the distance between East and West must be 12,500 miles.” “Ah,” said the rabbi, “that is good reasoning, but let me illustrate another answer for you. Watch. I face the East. I take one step back and pivot and now I face the West. The distance between East and West is only one step.”

What lessons are available to us in this story? What do we learn about the how and where of encountering difference, our opposite, “the other”? One strategy is to travel halfway round the globe. Another strategy is to turn and face our neighbor. The posture of the seeker or sojourner is critical. The seeker takes initiative, must move, must step out or back as the case may be. Interestingly, the step may well be a step back—a non-aggressive sign, a modest and reflective movement that opens up possibilities, makes it easy to turn, to change direction, to change perspective literally and figuratively. The story challenges us to notice, honor, and respect both the closeness of our human connections and the vast differences laced through those connections. It makes a memorable starting point for a discussion of the global/local dimensions of educating for peace.

The environmental slogan think globally, act locally captures not only the natural world’s inter-relatedness and interdependence, but also signals that anytime we connect with people across boundaries of cultural difference we engage the global community. Thus intercultural work encompasses what in many spheres are viewed as separate projects of international education and multicultural education. At Pacific Lutheran University (PLU), we are employing the term “global education” to denote the seamless nature of the educational project.

Forty percent of 2003 bachelor recipients engaged in international study. Such participation places PLU among the top ten master’s level universities in the United States. A new strategic plan challenges us further to increase participation in on- and off-campus global education opportunities and to continue to build distinctive academic programs and global PLU presence. The motivating vision of the strategic plan—educating for a just, healthy, sustainable and peaceful world, finds grounding in our Lutheran identity and university mission. We believe that the intellect is cultivated as “a tool of conscience and an instrument of service.” We see service as hopeful and directed at seeking solutions and building bridges among peoples. Hence, the articulation of the ideal toward which we are striving, as individuals and as a community. The context of an unsettled and rapidly changing world of increasing economic, cultural, political, and ecological interdependence requires this kind of faithful commitment among those being prepared “for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership, and care—for people, for their communities and for the earth.”

Distinction in global education means more at Pacific Lutheran University than the existence of specific academic opportunities and high participation in these. It means that we are intentional about structuring learning so that students grow in intercultural knowledge and abilities as they progress in their studies. With support from the Teagle Foundation, a faculty planning team is adapting key approaches to intellectual and personal development (see Perry, Bennett, Musil) to create and elaborate a “Global Education Continuum.” The Continuum is a flexible four-phase model intended to nurture the ability to participate actively in global learning and working environments:

- The Introductory phase focuses on exposure to PLU’s commitment to and understanding of global education.
The Exploratory phase concentrates on deepening of content and intellectual skill development, with emphasis on intercultural skills.

The Participatory phase represents sustained, cross-cultural experiential learning that provides practice and refinement of intercultural abilities and understandings (e.g. service learning, internship).

In the Integrative phase, students focus on experiencing global/local connections and life skills development as it relates to vocation and career in an increasingly interdependent world.

The Continuum is conceptualized to serve all participants in global education; but whereas all students should make progress along the Continuum, only students with exceptional commitments to global citizenship are presumed to engage the integrative phase. The Global Education Continuum provides the framework within which the overlapping experiences of a student’s academic program and personal transformation take place. In this way, global education at PLU is seen as a focused and intentional journey of intellectual and personal development. Appropriately, we can name these intercultural pilgrims “sojourners.” Likewise, their faculty, staff, and community mentors continue to sojourn, as they deepen and update their global perspectives.

Universities are inherently global organizations, dedicated to the widespread circulation of ideas and often people. In many cases, a happy serendipity governs the array of off-campus programs and partnerships that a college or university offers. Without denying the fortuitous connections that can accompany a new faculty hire or a new set of professional networks, the goal of deepening intercultural expertise requires that PLU and like-motivated campuses assume an intentional and disciplined posture with respect to our global partners. Why are we building and sustaining programs in certain places and with certain partners and not others?

PLU proposes to identify a limited number of focal locations for sustained off-campus presence. These sites will function as the primary gateways for global education development and will be integrated with the vision of educating for a just, healthy, sustainable, and peaceful world. Each site or gateway will provide a mix of programs across the Global Education Continuum—programs that connect with the on-campus curriculum and that feature well-designed experiential components like service learning, internships, and faculty-student research. A proven host-country partnership, strong leadership from both on-campus faculty and in-country staff and faculty, and a two-way flow of persons and activity will be key elements of the infrastructure.

The gateways will come on-line gradually over the next seven years. The Puget Sound region will serve as one of the sites. A couple of the other suggested locations are quite tentative, but the core cluster of sites is unlikely to change, since it represents commitments linked to our area studies programs and already-existing PLU semester programs. Here are three examples of current program development, as illustrations of how intentional new partnerships open the door to new global/local explorations of vocation and service: Trinidad in Tacoma, Community Partners in China, and Norway in Namibia. In all three cases, impulses and connections flow among a web of university and community partners, thereby honoring multidisciplinary approaches and experiential learning.

Trinidad in Tacoma

Ten years ago, in 1993, English Department faculty member Barbara Temple-Thurston led a January-term student group to Trinidad and Tobago. Three years later, our semester-long program at the University of the West Indies began. One of the learning objectives for the program is the transformation of racial and class consciousness through residence, study, and service in a highly-diverse community.

As Dr. Temple-Thurston describes the experience, “In Trinidad our students share classrooms with bright and talented Trinidadians who excel in a rigorous academic setting; they participate in cultural events and festivals with Trinidadians from all walks of life; and they commit to four hours a week of service learning work. Their volunteer experience means they serve at the pleasure of a variety of organizations and communities in whatever way they are needed, and they are guided and supervised by Trinadian supervisors of various ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds.”

While abroad, the sojourners move between the academic sector and the local community, encountering the legacies of colonization and observing the prejudices of class culture at work. We house the students in a modest guest house in a working-class neighborhood on the edge of the university, rather than in the university residence halls, and to ensure their interaction with folk culture we
immerse them in traditional festivals and ceremonies like Carnival, Phagwa, and Hosay.

A return to campus after five months in Trinidad can produce considerable frustration, as there are few opportunities to process the sojourn with peers and to integrate intercultural skills into daily life. As one strategy for enabling the sojourners to continue their journeys, program faculty, with the help of Ione Crandall director of PLU's Center for Public Service, envisioned a new residential opportunity in the local Tacoma neighborhood known as Salishan.

Salishan is a multicultural, subsidized housing community for a variety of groups, including Native Americans, African Americans and recent immigrants from Cambodia, Korea, Laos, Mexico, and Eastern Europe. Serving the community as Lutheran mission pastor is Ron Vignec, a former PLU campus pastor who assists with bridge building. Ron’s wife Nancy plays a leading role with the Tacoma Housing Authority and together, they helped broker an arrangement whereby several returnees from the Trinidad program will live in, and serve, the Salishan community. In return for a commitment to service, the housing authority is waiving the rent for one of the modest housing units. Even with the goodwill of all parties, it took almost a full academic year for the various agreements to be signed off on by the university and the local authorities. The first PLU students moved into the residence in summer 2003.

The Trinidad/Salishan initiative nurtures two intentional relationships: one local and one international. In Barbara Temple-Thurston’s words, “We are articulating the intersection of these two seemingly different worlds of Salishan and Trinidad and Tobago. By placing our students and ourselves at this dynamic intersection, we are learning to forge lasting and meaningful relationships with our surrounding communities and our friends in the Caribbean . . . Our students experience being resident members of a global and local community with expectations of service to both communities, an experience that deftly displays the connecting strands of diversity, culture, and otherness across the global/local divide.”

Support from the Association of American Colleges and Universities FIPSE-funded initiative “Liberal Education and Global Citizenship: The Arts of Democracy” has advanced curricular development for this program.

Community Partners in China

Chinese Studies is an interdisciplinary major that began as an area focus within the Global Studies program. Over the last twenty years, the China expertise of the PLU faculty has grown remarkably, as has the economic development importance of China to our state and region. Government and business leaders see facility in the Chinese language and advanced cultural understanding as precious assets and PLU is committed to providing access to these tools and to functioning as a bridge builder with China.

Founded in 2002, China Partners Network is a collaborative network of primarily Lutheran institutions in the State of Washington, including Good Samaritan Hospital, PLU, and a number of congregations, “who are committed to working in partnership with each other and with the Amity Foundation for the purpose of providing much needed health care, education, and basic needs for children and families in China.” Three campus entities are participating directly in the evolution of the network: Church Relations, Chinese Studies, and the Wang Center for International Programs.

By collaborating locally on fundraising, public education, and the development and administration of service learning opportunities, the network is able to respond to the needs and priorities identified and articulated by the in-country partner. Importantly, this Chinese partner, the Amity Foundation, is a well-regarded, Christian-based social service organization. We are excited about the student placements that will evolve through the partners network and the lives that are already being improved through the teaching of new therapy techniques for working with children with disabilities and the delivery of wheelchairs.

Having sent students to China for semester-long programs of study for more than twenty years, we have reached a decision point concerning the specific location(s) and affiliation(s) that will define our China gateway going forward. Both Zhongshan University and Sichuan University have functioned as valuable exchange partners in years past, but a university connection alone is no longer sufficient. The China Partners Network provides an additional dimension for organizing and focusing our China presence. The link to our university mission and identity is obvious. The opportunities for students in professional programs like Nursing and Education are attractive. The posture of working according to the priorities established in-country by the Amity Foundation is ethically important. Even though Shanghai and Beijing are magnets for current business interests, we find ourselves affirming the importance of a PLU presence in a less developed region. Thus, academic decision-making and community
partnerships become aligned to advance both student learning and the quality of life in rural China.

Another community dimension to PLU’s Chinese Studies program deserves mention in this connection, namely the identification of local partner school districts to augment Chinese instruction in the K-12 curriculum and encourage joint co-curricular programming and events. These efforts are being made possible by a major grant from the Freeman Foundation. Dr. Gregory Youtz, Professor of Music and Chair of Chinese Studies, provides the coordinating faculty leadership for these community partner initiatives.

**Norway in Namibia**

PLU was founded in 1890 as an academy for Norwegian immigrants. Appropriately, Scandinavian Area Studies became the university’s first area studies major (1977). Outreach to the Pacific Northwest Scandinavian-American community featured prominently in the initial program design and research priorities and found concrete expression in a campus Scandinavian Cultural Center, dedicated in 1989. A robust stream of students from Scandinavia has continued to energize the university’s cultural identity, but the intellectual and political weight of the international education curriculum shifted as a faculty generation with teaching interests in Kierkegaard, Rølvaag, and Ingmar Bergman films began to be replaced by faculty focused on Asia, Central and Latin America, and Africa.

Three years ago, a senior professor in political science and well-recognized expert in international education, Dr. Ann Kelleher, formulated a new program emphasis around the theme of “The Nordic Approach to Peace, Democracy, and Development.” In short order, the university acquired the necessary building blocks for a multi-faceted academic initiative, energized by on- and off-campus constituents and enabled by private and governmental funding.

The initiative is built on a formal three-institution partnership among Hedmark University College in Norway, the University of Namibia, and PLU. As Ann Kelleher explained when program activities began in 2001, “Envisioned as necessary to achieve authenticity, the three-way partnership has elicited enthusiastic and useful cooperation among its member institutions. Each one makes essential contributions . . . . Hedmark’s connections to Namibia are solid, based on continuous, long-lived personal relationships at the highest levels in the government and education. Having an active, enthusiastic partner in a developing country gives programmatic reality to one of the most distinctive guidelines in the Norwegian approach to development, that projects must be ‘recipient led.’ Analyzing examples of democracy and development without the equal participation of an institution in a developing country [University of Namibia] would belie the very essence of [the initiative]. For its contribution, PLU will provide the partnership’s institutional base, a focus for outside funding, and active as well as knowledgeable faculty and student participants.”

Alongside the university partners stands a significant NGO partner, the Namibia Association of Norway (NAMAS), whose work with the peoples of Namibia predates independence and whose reputation and contacts open many doors to university representatives. Additionally, the Lutheran church plays an influential and supportive role. In the late 1980s, Southwestern Washington ELCA congregations sponsored a first generation of Namibian students at PLU, all of them now exemplary contributors to the young democracy and important role models and facilitators for the current student generation.

Accomplishments to date include a PLU January short-term course in human rights and democracy at the University of Namibia, student-faculty research projects in Norway and Namibia, and faculty and curriculum development. Fall 2003 finds ten PLU students, a PLU professor of journalism, and several Namibian students gathered at Hedmark University College to launch “Democracy, Development, and Peace: A Semester of Active Learning in Norway.” Through case studies and site visits the sojourners will study Norwegian public policy and its implications for sustainable growth and peace building throughout the world. Internship placements and extended research projects follow the foundational coursework, ensuring that participants immerse themselves in local community contexts.

A specific project emanating from the Norway/Namibia/PLU partnership further illustrates new modes of conceptualizing global/local connections. Professor Kelleher wrote a successful USAID grant for capacity building for the Ondao primary school in rural, northwestern Namibia. Actually thirty individual school sites, under a single administrative unit, the Ondao school serves the proudly traditional, semi-nomadic Himba people. The Namibia Association of Norway provided the seed funding and professional expertise to develop the Ondao mobile schools, including the army tents used as classrooms. Now the three partner universities are collaborating to deliver training workshops for the native teachers seeking formal certification as teachers.
As members of PLU’s education faculty have undertaken this training assignment, PLU students, members of University Congregation, local secondary-school students, school administrators, and other community members have stepped forward to volunteer school supplies, to host the Ondao school principals on a professional development visit to Washington State, and to dream together about other ways to serve the Ondao learners and teachers, including creating libraries in a tub to circulate among the tent sites.

This three-way partnership offers creative new approaches to conceptualizing education for peace. Many next-step investigations are under exploration, including a focus on indigenous peoples in the three partner locations.

Common Threads and Commitments

Taken together, these three initiatives reinforce PLU’s capacity to serve the Puget Sound region with culture-specific resources, expertise in multiculturalism and development, and engagement with peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and related themes. The case studies illustrate that for experiential learning to flourish and intercultural skills and problem solving capacities to deepen, U.S. universities must seek out capable and committed partners abroad—both academic and community based, and strive for long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. In these examples, partners beyond the university sphere include foundations, NGO’s, hospitals and clinics, schools, a variety of service and internship sites, and in each case a link with the Lutheran church.

Furthermore, the deliberate cultivation of local partnerships can ensure that students have access to relevant pre-departure and re-entry experiences. Few universities focus systematically on helping students reflect upon their sojourner experiences. Yet these reflections and follow-up community engagements are critical aspects of a successful journey along the global education continuum. They also have powerful implications for the discernment of vocation. A major grant from the Lilly Endowment has provision for the development of sojourner reflection groups, which PLU will pilot in spring semester 2004. Developing domestic internships—specifically for returning study abroad students is a priority project for our new international internship coordinator.

In the 1990s, four educational researchers examined the life stories of individuals whom they described as committed to the common good. Writing in Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World (1996), Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks observed: “The single most important pattern we have found in the lives of people committed to the common good is what we have come to call a constructive, enlarging engagement with the other . . . We believe that those who best practice a commitment to an inclusive common good are paradoxically those who can simultaneously reach across tribes and remain firmly rooted in the particularities of their own.” Larry Daloz’ essay “Transformative Learning for the Common Good” (2000) translates the Common Fire discovery into an educational context. Here Daloz elaborates what he calls four conditions of transformation: presence of the other, reflective discourse on assumptions, mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action.

In that Pacific Lutheran University and her sister Lutheran colleges and universities care deeply about the commonweal, we ought to take these research findings seriously in the design of our global education programs. Our work will then move out from our campuses in the impulse to educate for a more peaceful world. It will also move in and through our campuses as we aspire to be, and model, what Lee Knefelkamp calls, “communities of peace.”

Questions for reflection and discussion

On your campus, how far is it between East and West?

How vigorously have you considered the design of intercultural education for personal transformation? For global citizenship? For responding to God’s call?

Who are your partners in intercultural education? How are concepts of neighbor and partner understood and practiced?

What language works best for you—global, intercultural, international, multicultural—and why?

In what ways does your campus community facilitate the return and ongoing development of student, faculty, and staff sojourners?

How might we come together as a community of Lutheran colleges to explore the paths, and practice the postures, that show the way toward a just and peaceful world?

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Notes

Lee Knefelkamp (Teachers College, Columbia University) told this story at the Institute for Intercultural Communication in July 2003 and I am grateful for her permission to retell it in the tradition of oral wisdom.

Works Cited


