Chapter 2

Case Study of a Sustained Educator Partnership between the U.S. and Norway

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an ongoing international partnership that involves the exchange of Norwegian secondary school teachers and U.S. college students with an overarching goal of promoting cultural understanding. The author implemented a descriptive, action research case study to document the background and history of the partnership, describe the key partners and their roles, outline the academic activities, discuss logistical and fiscal considerations, and address issues of sustainability and plans for the future. The author aims to provide a comprehensive narrative of the development and implementation of the partnership from its inception to provide a basis for improving and advancing the partnership in the future. The author also discusses lessons that may inform similar international collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher educators must create learning experiences that help pre- and in-service teachers develop intercultural skills, global competence, and diverse perspectives to combat the lack of diversity in the teaching force (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Sleeter, 2001). Study abroad experiences can internationalize the teacher education curriculum (Longview Foundation, 2008; Merryfield, 2000; Schneider, 2004) and help learners develop “worldmindedness” (Merryfield, Lo, Po, & Kasai, 2008). In addition, such programs can provide valuable intercultural immersion experiences in which students “have to grapple with being in the minority, do not necessarily know how to act, and are temporarily unable to retreat to the comfort of a culturally familiar setting (Sleeter, 2001, p. 97).

International student teaching placements hold great promise for promoting intercultural competence of educators (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Kissock & Richardson, 2010), but such experiences are long in duration and not widely accessible to students at all institutions. Short-term study abroad programs
and study tours, however, have become increasingly popular in all areas of higher education (Hulstrand, 2015), including education. While research suggests that long-term programs may be more beneficial for students, Dwyer (2004) found that short-term summer programs were nearly as effective as year-long and full-semester programs at influencing areas of students’ personal growth including self-confidence, maturity, and world view. Education students can benefit greatly from carefully designed, short-term study abroad programs that engage students in “direct, authentic cultural encounters and guided reflection upon those encounters” (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 7).

While researchers have examined the outcomes of short-term study abroad programs for educators (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011; Shiveley & Misco, 2015), few have documented practical aspects of program development in a rigorous, systematic way. Program developers must, for example, be careful not to over-schedule or over-work the students (Hulstrand, 2015) and to allow ample time and space for reflection (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011). The course experiences—which may include classroom observations, lectures, and cultural events—must be academic and not touristic in purpose (Hulstrand, 2015). Costs must also be chief consideration for program developers. The Forum on Education Abroad State of the Field 2015 survey found that the top-ranked concern for respondents was program costs and rising costs (4.3/5.0, -0.2), and U.S. respondents identified the rising cost of participation as the top challenge to increasing the number of students participating in education abroad (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2016).

Since 2010, the University of South Carolina (USC) has been engaged in the professional development of Norwegian secondary school teachers through a series of study tours in South Carolina. The partnership has evolved from a study tour of the South for teachers from throughout Norway to a true reciprocal partnership between USC and the upper secondary schools in one district: the Romerike region of Akershus County. In-service teachers from Norway and preservice teachers from USC engage in short-term study abroad programs that involve classroom lectures and workshops, observations and interactive meetings in schools, visits to cultural and historic sites, and informal cultural immersion experiences.

In this chapter, the author describes the partnership in detail. He implemented a descriptive, action research case study (Mills, 2004; Stringer, 2014) to document the background and history of the partnership, describe the key partners and their roles, outline the academic activities, discuss logistical and fiscal considerations, and address issues of sustainability and plans for the future. By documenting these aspects of the partnership, the author aims to provide a comprehensive narrative of the development and implementation of the partnership from its inception to provide a basis for improving and advancing the partnership in the future. While the purpose of the case study is not to formally assess program impacts on participants, the author will share some tentative outcomes that emerged from the analysis. The author also hopes to provide others with lessons that may inform their international programs for educators.

**METHODOLOGY**

The author designed a qualitative, descriptive case study (Stake, 1998; Yin, 2013) focused on the development and implementation of the partnership between the USC Department of Instruction and Teacher Education (ITE) and the Romerike English Teachers Network from 2010 to 2016. He was specifically interested in documenting the development of the partnership, assessing some of the benefits and outcomes of the activities, and identifying future directions for the partnership. Thus, the study had a reflexive aspect as is typical of action research (Caskey, 2005; Mills, 2003).