The BIG Picture: Reflections on the Role of International Educational Exchange in Peace and Understanding

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As humans we've always lived in relation to each other – whether in small local groups of hunters/gatherers or in virtual social networks that connect us with strangers around the world. Mobility and exchange have always been part of human history, although much of it relegated to history books and long since forgotten - such as Cahokia, now a historic site in the U.S. state of Illinois but at one time the largest and most sophisticated prehistoric city north of Mexico, whose people maintained vast trade networks throughout the eastern half of the North American continent. In many ways the realities of geo-political developments in current times are simply a variation on past human history, albeit with graver issues that confront human kind.

The horrific devastation and realities of twentieth century world wars resulted in the intentional creation of numerous organizations and programs with specific missions to further peace and international understanding in the hope of preventing such horrors in the future. Examples include American Field Service secondary exchanges, started by ambulance drivers in World War I, the International Baccalaureate Organization, the formation of the Institute of International Education after World War I, the formation of the U.S. Peace Corps after World War II, as well as other programs like Fulbright exchanges and later the Chevening Scholarships. In these examples, the underlying assumption was that peace and understanding was not just the purview of nation states (as addressed through the establishment of the League of Nations and later the United Nations) but could also be addressed through "soft power" at the individual level, with the ultimate goal being a more peaceful world. As Wilson notes, there is a dearth of research about whether educational exchange leads to a more peaceful world,[1] particularly given that there are limits to individual-level peacemaking within the broader nation-state system. Nonetheless, there are numerous examples of individuals who have indeed made a difference in the world, including giants such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, or Nelson Mandela, as well as many unsung heroes, and some of the programs mentioned here operate on the premise of the power of the individual to affect change in the world. Since World War II, there has been an increase in educational exchange, particularly at the post-secondary level. The articles in this issue explore various aspects of this: Atkinson's article looks at lessons learned from educational exchange that occurs within US military institutions,[2] Bean's article highlights the Fulbright program and looks at

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[1] Iain Wilson, "Exchanges and Peacemaking: Counterfactuals and Unexplored Possibilities," *All Azimuth* 4, no. 2 (2015): 5-18.
[2] Carol Atkinson, "The Role of U.S. Elite Military Schools in Promoting Intercultural Understanding and Democratic Governance," *All Azimuth* 4, no. 2 (2015): 19-29.

strategic messaging and communication of such programs,[3] and Wilson's article addresses this question even more directly in looking at how exchanges can contribute to peacemaking. This commentary outlines some prevailing myths around educational exchange, sets forth three value propositions to inform future international educational exchange and concludes with the bigger picture of the role of educational exchange in promoting peace and international understanding.

1. Some Myths

Let's start with some myths about international educational exchange:

1) Bring diverse people together and "magic" will happen.

2) Study abroad and come back interculturally competent.

3) Exposure to another culture is sufficient for intercultural understanding.

4) No special training is needed when going into another culture.

5) Results of international educational exchange can be measured by one evaluation tool.

Though the above statements are all indeed myths, they nonetheless are stated with frightening frequency. In debunking these myths, several theoretical frames can be utilized including Putnam's[4] and Allport's[5] work which conclude that simply being in the vicinity of difference does not result in meaningful, intercultural learning. In fact, Putnam[6] found that such contact can result in greater mistrust between groups of people, and Allport[7] found that certain criteria need to be in place for more meaningful interactions to occur, including common goals and similar status (and Atkinson's article provides a good example of this). Further, according to my dissertation study resulting in the first research-based definition and framework of intercultural competence[8], intercultural competence is a lifelong process (beyond one experience) and must be intentionally addressed (beyond one training or class) as such competence does not generally occur naturally. Additionally, much has been written about the importance of how international educational exchange is conducted so that such exchange does not reinforce ethnocentrism but indeed does lead to transformative learning and attitudinal change. In terms of evaluating results of educational exchange, much research has actually been undertaken over the last couple decades in this regard, with common themes emerging as to the importance of multiple measures of assessment and evaluation (Bean's article, for example, discusses just one evaluation while, in fact, there would need to be multiple measures, beyond self-report, to ascertain concrete results), as well as longitudinally over time (Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE)[9] project actually looked fifty years back in terms of study abroad students' changes over time including their life choices.)

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[3]   Hamilton Bean, "Strategic Communication and the Marketization of Educational Exchange," *All Azimuth* 4, no. 2 (2015): 31-44.

[4]   Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (June 2007): 137-74.

[5]   Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (MA: Perseus Books, 1954).

[6]   Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum*," 137-74.

[7]   Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

[8]   Darla K. Deardorff, "The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization*," Journal of Studies in International Education* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 241-66; Darla K. Deardorff, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (California: SAGE, 2009).

[9]   R. Michael Paige, Gerald W. Fry, Elizabeth M. Stallman, Jasmina Josić, and Jae-Eun Jon, "Study Abroad for Global Engagement: The long-term impact of mobility experiences," *Intercultural Education* 20, no. 1 (2009): 29-44.

2. Implications and Three Value Propositions

The predominant implication of these myths and underlying theoretical frameworks for organizations involved in international educational exchange is this: *Intentionality is key* in preparing, sending, and debriefing from such experiences. It's not enough to put students on planes and send them abroad. Rather, intentional intercultural training is crucial before students leave, while they are abroad and especially after they come back, as they process what they experienced and learned. Further, given that intercultural competence development is a lifelong process, it's important to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work since students are at different places in their journeys, even before they venture abroad. The experience itself is instrumental in terms of how it is set up and the various parameters in which students engage in the local culture and community. Beyond these implications, though, there are deeper questions about the extent to which such exchanges indeed lead to peace and understanding.

For example, one burning question is this: What is necessary for humans to get along together? This is the question that I've spent the last decade researching and exploring through the concept of intercultural competence. Upon further reflection of the literature around this concept, and by way of synthesizing some of the points in the articles here, I'd like to put forth three value propositions that could inform international educational exchange at its very core, providing a foundation for peace and understanding:

1) *Extend Respect.* Respect, which means truly valuing the other as a fellow human, needs to be at the heart of human interactions. Some languages use the term "honor" – honoring others which is about valuing humans and ensuring their rights as humans. Regardless of whether we agree with each other, we need to humanize the other, even and especially when it is difficult. One of the surest routes to violence is when we dehumanize others and consider them as less than human. In looking back at history, we can see countless examples of what happens when humans are categorized as less than human – rather through slavery, through war, genocide, or through gross violations of the human spirit. Respect, then, must be at the core of any international educational exchange, as well as any human interaction. Respect resists categorization of others. A key element in respect is *mutuality* – how much are we able to learn from each other in the international experience? There is much that each of us has to learn from the other; one measurement of a successful exchange may be the degree of mutuality and co-learning from "the other."

2) *Enact Ubuntu.* Ubuntu, initially a humanistic value originating from South Africa, sees humanity as bound together. Literally, this value means that a human is human through others. Desmond Tutu further explained this term in the following way: "Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the

whole of humanity."[10] Other cultures have similar concepts such as *kizuna* (Japanese), *siratulrahim* (Malay) and *alli kawsay* and *nandereko* (Andean). This concept also highlights the importance of seeing from other cultural perspectives, so there is not a reliance solely on concepts within one culture to define values in human interactions. At the post-secondary level, many universities espouse the concept of "global citizenship" which is in a similar vein and yet, this value of Ubuntu goes even a step further to a deeper identity of an interconnected human being, living in community, with community being defined both locally and globally. This implies a paradigm shift for many from the traditional "us" vs. "them" to an expanded identity of "we're in this together." International educational exchanges, in promoting peace, need to ensure this value of Ubuntu permeates intercultural experiences so that participants gain this deeper sense of interconnectedness, beyond individual identity, and beyond "us versus other."

3) *Encourage Neighborliness.* Neighborliness is a term not often found in current Western literature and yet this value dates back to the earliest days of humanity. Ancient literature discusses the importance of loving one's neighbor – of not only being in relation with each other but in the *resulting actions* that occur through neighborliness- and in the end, literally loving one's neighbor. Both Confucius and Jesus commanded "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Religions note the importance – and even centrality – of loving one's neighbor. This is not just the purview of religion though. In the 17th century, famous Enlightenment philosopher John Locke stated, "To love our neighbors as ourselves is such a truth for regulating human society, that by that alone one might determine all cases in social morality."[11] How do we *behave* toward our neighbors, locally as well as neighbors through international exchange? What does it mean to be a "good neighbor?" Even more than that, how might the world be different if humans practiced actually loving their neighbors (which includes enemies) and putting others' needs as equal to one's own? Martin Luther King Jr.'s mentor, Howard Thurman, observed that "The first step toward love is to a common sharing of a sense of mutual value and worth. This cannot be discovered in a vacuum or in a series of artificial or hypothetical relationships. It has to be in a real situation, natural, free".[12] Thus, international educational exchange provides the real-life situations and contexts in which neighborliness can be practiced so that such experience goes beyond an academic exercise – or even a pleasurable touristic pursuit – to one that has the potential for building lasting relationships, expanding one's capacity to love, and in the end, for making a lasting investment toward building a more peaceful world.

These three core value propositions – of extending respect, enacting Ubuntu, and encouraging neighborliness – are interconnected and can be the basis of educational exchange moving forward, in not only ensuring that such exchanges go beyond academic study only but in fulfilling the broader role of moving toward a more peaceful world. Implementation will not necessarily be easy though, since each of these three values imply hard work, especially when confronted with the harsh realities of existing tensions and conflicts. Rather than give up or shy away, though, these are the instances when international educational exchange can play an even more vital role in peacemaking when embracing these core values. This, then,

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[10]   Desmond Tutu, "Ubuntu," Tutu Foundation UK, http://www.tutufoundationuk.org/ubuntu/.

[11]   John Locke, *The Locke Reader: Selections from the Works of John Locke* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 96.

[12]   Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 98.

means that international educational exchange needs to go beyond "safe realities" of the traditional exchange locations.

If we are to promote peace and understanding, however, we must also go beyond educational exchange. It's a start but it's not enough to simply move students around the world through these exchanges. Educators need to focus on ALL students, not just those privileged enough to study abroad. What does this mean? This means intentionally working with teachers so that they are adequately prepared to guide students in their intercultural learning – meaning that teacher education becomes an absolutely essential focal point for promoting peace. This means academics at higher education institutions need to be better prepared as well, through faculty development opportunities to enhance their own intercultural competence. This means infusing the curriculum at all levels of education with intercultural and international dimensions – beyond adding a reading or lecture – but in addressing the proposed value propositions throughout the curriculum, regardless of discipline.

In looking more broadly and reflecting on what we've learned and what may be needed in the future, some common themes emerge:

1) *Focus on building community.* It's about community, about learning from each other and not just learning from the holders of knowledge. It's about truly valuing each other – beyond the confines of one program or institution. How will we work together within our local communities? Within the global community? What are our obligations to each other? And what is necessary for us to get along together, whether locally or globally?

2) As we build community, let's *engage in authentic mutual dialogue* with the goal being not to necessarily reach agreement – or to further a one-sided message- but to mutually enrich our understanding of each other, and the world, and so doing, being willing to be changed through the dialogue.

3) As we engage in dialogue, let's *approach each other with cultural humility* – as we strive to truly respect and value each other and understand that our way of seeing the world is just one way, that our knowledge is not the truth and acknowledge that there are multiple truths.

3. Looking to the Future: The Bigger Picture

Twenty-five years ago, in 1993, a political scientist named Samuel Huntington wrote this of the future: "It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."[13] Huntington's subsequent book in 1996, *Clash of Civilizations*, led to a flurry of criticisms and responses, two of which I want to share briefly with you as a way of thinking about the future and framing some possible rethinking about the role of international educational exchange in promoting peace and understanding.

A Ghanaian-British-American philosopher named Kwame Anthony Appiah rejected the notion of a clashing world, and while recognizing the serious differences that exist, he

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[13]   Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22.

admonishes us to stop thinking of the world as "divided between the West and the Rest, between locals and moderns, between Us and Them".[14] But, rather, we need to remember the powerful ties that connect people across religions, culture and nations. The way forward, according to Appiah, is through mutual respect and understanding among the world's people and as idealistic as that may sound, he suggests that this can occur through the recognition that every person matters, that each person has a right to a life of dignity. This underscores the value proposition of respect, which I discussed previously. Seeking understanding does not mean seeking agreement, he goes on to say, and this understanding occurs through mutually enriching dialogue in which we *remain open to being changed by the other*, not trying to get others to agree with us. In so doing, we recognize our obligation to each other. So, one question is how do we engage others in mutually enriching dialogue? How can such dialogue become more integral to international educational exchange? And more importantly, how can we all remain open to being changed by others when we encounter difference – and similarity?

A second response to this clash of civilizations comes from a French political scientist and founder of the French Institute of International Affairs, Dominique Moisi, who explored the far-reaching emotional impact of globalization through what he calls the clash of emotions. He observed three common responses to globalization –hope, humiliation and fear- and suggests that in order to understand our changing world, we need to confront emotion – in ourselves and in society. In fact, he goes so far as to say that emotional frontiers will become as important as geographic frontiers, and calls for the mapping of the geopolitics of emotions. The way forward for Moisi is three-fold: 1) teach history and culture so as to better understand the context of emotion; 2) gain greater self-knowledge; and 3) transcend beyond fear and humiliation to embrace a hopeful future.[15] This, then, provides an agenda for future international educational exchange and Moisi's perspective raises a second practical question: How do we engage emotion as a tool for understanding the complexities of the 21st century?

Seventy-years ago World War II ended, bringing about a renewed commitment to peace and international understanding. And while this modern period has been deemed the most peaceful time in human history,[16] there are still countless clashes occurring, fueled by greed, misunderstandings, and a lack of Ubuntu. The challenges confronting us as humans are many –as are the opportunities, and I'd like to sum up both with one word: *Balance.* Restoring or achieving balance is at the core of many of the world's issues such as geopolitics, the environment, injustices, poverty… and therein also lies opportunity. To that end, what is the role of international educational exchange in addressing the imbalances that face us as humans, imbalances that exist between nations and continents, imbalances that exist in local communities, and imbalances that exist in the environment? What are the opportunities presented through these imbalances and how might international education exchange integrate such opportunities?

Inspirational leaders such as Mandela, King, Gandhi – as well as scholars of today such as Appiah and Moisi – have provided insight into how to proceed: to give dignity to each human

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[14]   Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2006), xxi.
[15]   Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).
[16]   Steve Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (NY: Penguin, 2011).

being, to go beyond a focus on ourselves as individuals to embrace our broader humanity– so as not to reinforce the status quo, or to perpetuate the divide between the haves and the have-nots. As Mandela noted, education is truly the most powerful weapon we have to change the world.[17] International educational exchange can play a continued role in changing the world through embracing a vision of truly caring for each other as humans sharing this planet, through building deeper relationships, through living in authentic community with each other- community that upholds human dignity for all. As we look to the future, let's (re)think about what it means to be true global citizens of the world, living out underlying values of respect, Ubuntu, and neighborliness as we keep this bigger picture in mind – of ultimately bringing balance to this world in which we live, and of what it means to instill students and all those connected to us, with not just the knowledge to succeed but with all that is necessary to succeed *together* in the future that tomorrow holds.

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[17] Nelson Mandela as quoted in Raymond Terrell and Randall Lindsay*, Culturally Proficient Leadership: The Personal Journey Begins Within* (California: Corwin Press, 2009), 112.