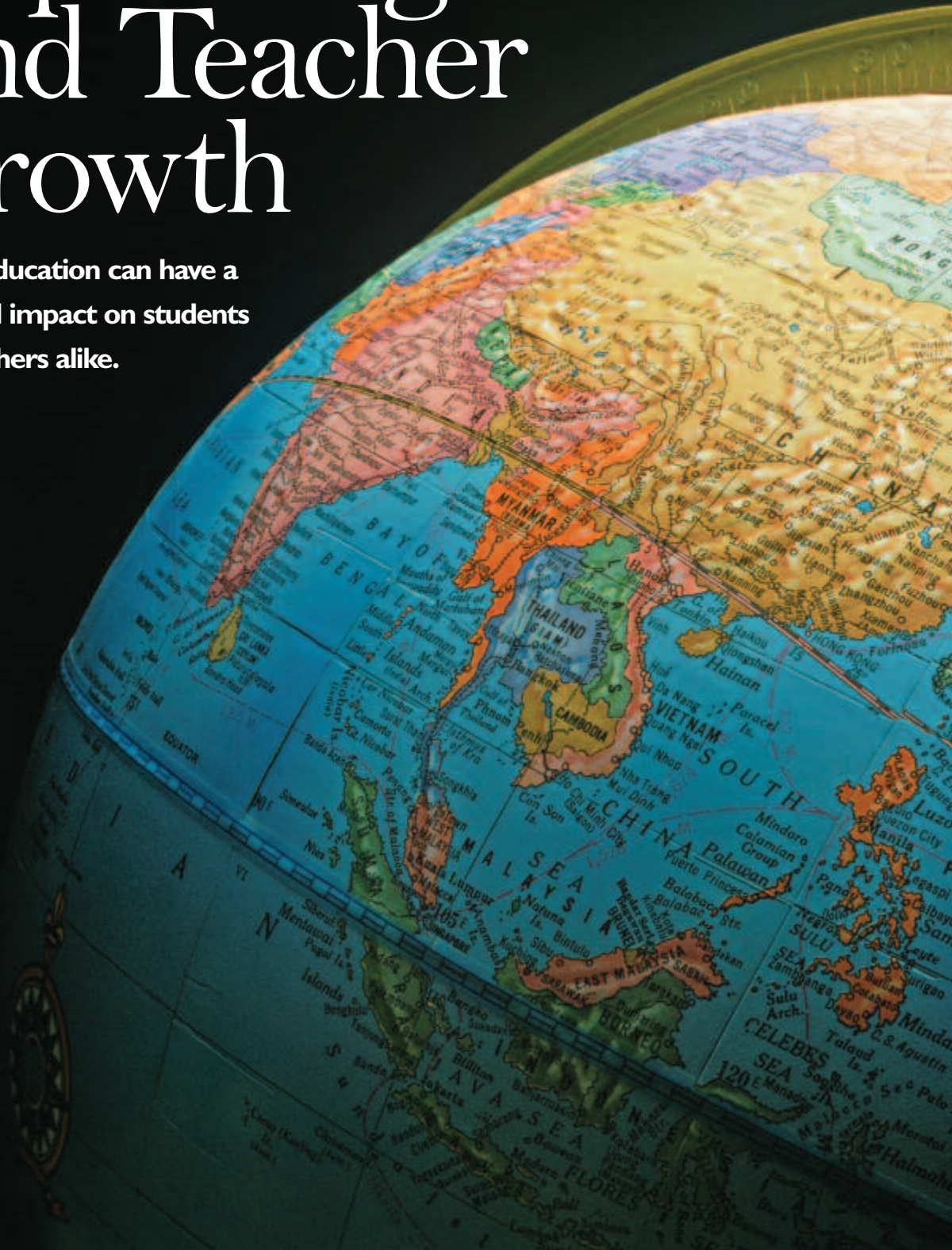



# Expanding Student and Teacher Growth

Global education can have a profound impact on students and teachers alike.





We have come a long way since the 1960s, when a plane ride to Europe from the United States required a fueling stop in Gander, Newfoundland. Today we can reach airports in far-off Asia in a single flight. Combine this ease of travel with the technology-facilitated communication afforded us through e-mail and the Internet, and clearly the world has shrunk in the past few decades. Correspondingly, at all levels of education it is our responsibility to help our students appreciate their place as citizens of the world by giving them the most enriched view of the global environment in which we study, work and live.

### The Global Perspective

Globalized learning should be an integral part of the educational maturing process. Students must become familiar with other cultures, customs, languages and value systems. As students develop international perspectives they can evaluate their lifestyles with a broader measure, namely a comparison to others. A global viewpoint can have a profound effect going forward—from an occupational as well as a social point of view.

Not only is it necessary for students to understand these differences, it is also important to provide them with the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of others. In sociology this is known as “the looking-glass theory.”

Consider the Virtual Enterprises International Program (VEI) created to expose high school and col-



lege students to the complexities of doing business around the world.

This program, which evolved from international cooperation with Austria, allows students to interact with their foreign counterparts through a network of 5,000 student-run companies spanning 40 countries and a breadth of products and services—from banking, insurance and technology to publishing, advertising, cosmetics, tourism and fashion.

Connections are made at “trade shows” and the transfer of funds is made electronically through a web-based banking system. VEI is now being offered in more than 500 high schools across the United

States and in schools in other countries. By engaging in commerce across industries, borders and cultures, VEI students experience the realities of conducting business in the global marketplace.

This concept will only become more important as future generations around the world come into even closer contact, requiring a more open understanding of other value systems and forms of “logic” so that discussions, negotiations and other interactions can proceed without technical faults. Even when all parties are speaking English, there can be grave misunderstandings. As George Bernard Shaw famously said, “The Americans and British are two people separated by a common language.”

## The Educator's Edge

Teachers and professors will also benefit from this new thrust toward globalization and the opportunities for professional development through comparative education. Opening up their world to other cultures provides them with added dimensions to include in research as well as the opportunity to submit jointly written publications immeasurably enhanced by varied points of view.

Having coauthored several books with colleagues in other countries, I have had the opportunity to look at my own discipline, mathematics education, from the perspective of those on other shores. This is not only professionally enriching; it has given me ideas that have been of benefit to my work with the State of New York.

As a member of the commission developing the state's mathematics standards, a number of concepts that I brought to the table were a direct result of my familiarity with the way mathematics is taught in Europe. For instance, I found that Americans in general are not as adept at proportional thinking as Europeans are. So as we developed the new mathematics standards for New York State, one area of focus was finding novel ways to enhance learning proportionality.

Teachers should be encouraged either individually, or in groups, to meet colleagues overseas and participate in the teaching process in other countries. These faculty exchanges, which are often facilitated by international organizations such as the Fulbright International Educational Exchange Program, should be encouraged by school leaders or college presidents.

Colleges and schools should also encourage faculty to connect their students with those of other countries through short-term visits, or academic year or semesters abroad. Special emphasis should be placed on maximizing interaction with students, faculty, and others from the host culture. Additionally, with the advent of video conferencing and Skype, virtual visits can substitute for foreign travel when that is not affordable.

In 1998, I initiated a program in New York City where we imported mathematics and science teachers from Austria. Over the next decade we brought more than 500 mathematics and science teachers to teach in New York City public schools, each of whom was - by their measure - greatly enhanced culturally, linguistically and socially, bringing back to their country a more globalized view of the world, which they then imparted to their students.

This was precisely what motivated the Austrian ministry of education to sponsor and encourage this exchange program. It should be noted that New York students were also enriched by having teachers from another culture. During the first decade of the 21st century, several other American cities replicated this idea to meet the then-severe shortage of mathematics and science teachers in the urban schools.

## Motivating Students

The most important thing a teacher can do is to motivate students, which also happens to be the most challenging aspect of planning a lesson. Often times a teacher's experience with and in other cultures can help stimulate ideas for the teaching process. For example, in mathematics, telling a story about a European structure like the Tower of Pisa and measuring its tilt can bring the subject to life for students.

At Mercy College we offer a Master's degree program in English Education in several Austrian cities for Austrian teachers, taught by Mercy faculty. The reciprocal benefits of this international cooperation are impressive. Austrian teachers are benefitting from a highly concentrated examination of the English language and American pedagogical techniques from native speakers of the language—the Mercy College professors. These professors are similarly broadened in their global perspective from the experience of having worked with students in another culture. They then bring back this experience to their classes at Mercy College.

The benefits of globalized education are boundless, limited only by our creativity. We as educators must do all we can to encourage multicultural interaction at all levels of education and in all subjects. As we move forward into the 21st century, new technology will only make the possibilities grow, even as the world continues to "shrink." Enthusiastic and creative openness to globalized education is a universal challenge for us all. ♦



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