

Educating for Global Competence:
A Case Study of North Woods International School

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Abstract

Due to drastic changes in education legislation over the years, many public schools in the United States are forced to cater their lessons to standardized testing. The administration and staff at North Woods International Elementary School have developed a curriculum where students stay on par with others in their district on national tests, but also receive a concentrated education in global competence. In a globalized world, this emphasis on global competence has the promise of giving students an early advantage in their educational careers.

Introduction

For all the wealth and power associated with the United States today, the number of serious problems buried within the nation's public education system is alarming. The authors of "Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World" categorize it into two major issues: First, the chronic failure to educate all students to high levels, no matter their social or economic background, and second, preparing students for work and civic roles in a globalized environment (Manislla and Jackson 2011, 104). Educational policies on both the federal and state level increasingly place emphasis on reading comprehension and mathematics; areas where the US ranks low in comparison to other developed nations (NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2010). However, this creates the possibility for other subjects to be left behind and, indeed, simple surveys reveal the lack of social studies education American children receive. A federal test done by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2010 showed that only half of fourth-graders correctly put the following in descending order of size: North America, the U.S., California and Los Angeles (NCES, Nation's Report Card 2010). According to a report by National Geographic, "half or fewer of young men and women 18-24 can identify the states of New York or Ohio on a map [50 percent and 43 percent, respectively]" (National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study). Clearly, the lack of attention paid to subjects within social studies, such as geography and history, in elementary school can lead to many skill deficiencies in adulthood.

With an increasingly competitive and global world market, it is crucial that children have access to the world through their education. Schools should be at the forefront in cultivating students to become “global citizens” so that as adults, they will be equipped with the skills for success in an international world:

At its core, educating for global competence means creating a school culture where investigating the world is common practice. In these environments, cultural, religious, class, and regional perspectives are recognized. They are addressed not only as students examine an historical event or a work of literature, but also when they interact informally with teachers and peers (Manislla & Jackson 2011, 101).

To educate in global citizenry is to heighten students’ awareness of their position within a global reality so that they can help contribute to the creation of a more peaceful world (Dolby 2008, 701).

North Woods International Elementary School in La Crosse, Wisconsin is an example of an option in the array of public education that focuses on creating globally competent students. According to the school profile, a goal is to prepare students “to strive for mutual understanding as contributing citizens in a diverse world” as a small step towards achieving world peace (North Woods Profile). Its focus is on global studies and languages rather than standardized tested subjects. This research project intends to examine how the North Woods International School addresses their goal to develop global citizens within the context of the La Crosse public elementary school system.

Background

La Crosse is a city of approximately 50,000 people in western Wisconsin along the Mississippi River. It is located on an alluvial plain with large bluffs surrounding the city on sides that do not border the river. The area is often referred to as the “coulee region” named after the narrow valleys between the bluffs. The population consists of 89.8% Caucasian, 2.3% African American, 4.9% Asian, and all others comprising 3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The city is served by the La Crosse School District, which consists of twenty-one charter, elementary,

middle, and high schools. Of these twenty-one schools, North Woods stands out from the rest in the district and even those in the entire state in terms of preparing students to enter a globalized workforce.

North Woods International Elementary School became an international school in 2006. According to their school brochure, being an international school means including:

- (1) Core subjects approached from an international viewpoint,
- (2) Spanish language instruction beginning in preschool with choice of Spanish Exploration or Partial Immersion Programs,
- (3) School-wide projects and in depth study of countries and cultures,
- (4) Art, music and physical education curricula [to] integrate international education culture and traditions.



Figure 1: Location of La Crosse relative to UW-Madison (Lyons & Dorsch, 2011)

As of 2010, their 395 enrolled students were composed of 68% Caucasian, 20.8% Asian American,

7.8% African American, and 2.3% Hispanic.

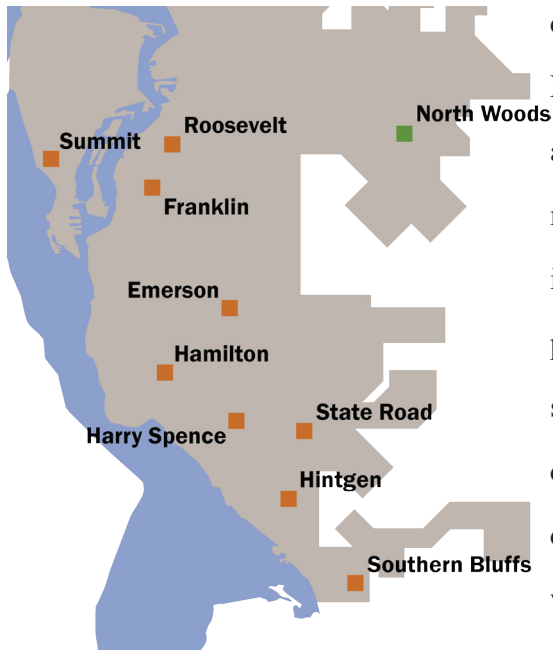


Figure 2. La Crosse School District Elementary Schools (Dorsch, 2011)

North Woods is located in one of the lower income areas of La Crosse and is a “plus choice” school. This means that it is similar to any other elementary school in that it serves the surrounding neighborhood and this population makes up about two thirds of the school’s students. The other third is made up of “choice” students, who apply for acceptance from elsewhere in the district and the city’s periphery. Recently, lotteries and waiting lists were used as demand for the school has increased (Brauer, 11/11/2011).

Methods

We were unable to find materials through public mediums directly relating to the importance of international education in elementary school settings. Several sources of case studies on international schools were found and are used as background. Other articles were on the ways in which traditional elementary schools attempt to incorporate globally connected ideas into the classroom . Due to the lack of literary findings pertaining specifically to the importance of elementary level international education, it is believed that the topic of interest is a mostly untouched subject matter.

To collect most of our primary data, interviews were conducted with several North Woods teachers and staff. This decision allowed us to obtain and incorporate direct quotes from our interviewees as well as ask immediate follow-up questions as new topics arose. Interviews encouraged them to give more involved answers which may not have been accomplished with a questionnaire or survey. Also, all of our interviewees provided contact information that we used to email additional questions. However, because interviews are time and effort intensive, we were limited in the number we could conduct. Thus, we were unable to delve deep into certain areas of the school, such as their Spanish immersion program. Our main contact at the school, Principal Sandy Brauer, decided who the additional interview candidates would be. This meant that she had some influence on what information was gathered, or perhaps more importantly, what was not gathered.



Figure 3: Front Entrance to North Woods International Elementary School.
(www.rschooldtoday.com, 2011)

We decided to provide interview questions in advance. This decision brought about its own set of positives and negatives. By providing the questions, interviewees were allowed time to formulate more coherent responses than may have been given without prior knowledge. Alternatively, it is possible these answers reflected a more positive opinion on the school than if the interviewees had not prepared in advance. With the questions, the respondents knew the concepts that were important to the research ahead of time and tailored some of their answers towards those ideas.

All of our interviews took place at North Woods International School on Friday, November 11th, 2011. The interviewees included Sandy Brauer - Principal of North Woods International School and District Administrator for Social Studies and World Languages, Julie Welch - 4th and 5th grade teacher, Nadia Hindelah - Special Education teacher and director of the Drama Club, and Linda Watson - School Library Media Center (LMC) director. Conducting the interviews in their offices or classrooms allowed interviewees to provide secondary materials if they believed it would be informative. This happened on multiple occasions and was helpful in understanding the topics that were being discussed. Yet, the time and location of our interviews during the school day may have caused some disruption. On one occasion, an interview had to end as students returned to the room.

Many of these concerns never came to fruition. There were no indications that responses were not genuine or what respondents truly felt. Although distractions may have been an issue, there were no indications from interviewees that answers were compromised by any attention conflicts. Responses from these interviews provided significant insight into the project study area. Attached as Appendices A and B are the interview questions used to obtain the bulk of our primary data. In developing the interviews, questions were grouped together to help with both interview flow as well as post-interview analysis. With regards to Appendix A: North Woods Principal Interview Questions, the first three questions are designed to elicit background information about the interview subject. This is useful in developing a biography of the person. From these basic inquiries, questions four, five, and six deal with Brauer's dual role as principal and

District Social Studies Curriculum Director. These questions give us vital information about North Wood's place in the district and how they modify the district's curriculum to their own ends. Questions seven through eleven were asked to gather information about the atmosphere and culture of the school through the lens of North Wood's stated goal that "Students will develop global competence." (North Woods International School Profile – Evidence of Success, 2011) The next two questions, eleven and twelve, deal with assessing achievement in the students at North Woods International School. These were designed to determine whether standardized tests can measure global competence, or if the school finds different ways to determine a student's success in this area. A final question gave us information on the future of students at the school and how they may differ from those who attend another elementary school in the district.

Appendix B contains the questions asked of the staff at North Woods International Elementary School. The grouping scheme follows much of the same structure found in Appendix A with a few notable differences. The five initial background information questions are different for staff because they attempted to derive some comparisons between a North Wood's classroom and one in a more "traditional" school in the district. From there, two standardized testing and curriculum questions were addressed. We felt the staff had a smaller role in these areas, so asking the questions early allowed us to get data, but also move quickly to matters that we felt the staff were better suited to comment on. Question eight allowed us to transition the interview from testing to alternative measures of success that North Wood's deploys or has developed. Questions nine through thirteen attempt to provide some of the same type of data as questions seven through eleven in Appendix A. Finally, question fourteen was designed to elicit the same type of response as question fourteen in Appendix A.

Data and Analysis

I. Education Policy

Of major concern to this research is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, enacted by President George W. Bush in 2001. As part of a reform of the Elementary and Secondary Educa-

tion Act of 1965, NCLB focuses on the creation of accountability systems intended to challenge standards and produce improvements in reading and mathematics, according to the executive summary of the policy issued by the Department of Education (Dept. of Edu., NCLB, 1). Failure to create these systems will result in loss of federal funds for education for that state. Additionally, individual schools must achieve 'Adequate Yearly Progress' (NCLB, 2001). If public schools do not meet testing standards a variety of steps are taken to remedy the situation including converting them into charter schools, being placed under private or direct state management, or possible school closure.

This particular agenda is a point of contention because it tends to push other subjects such as geography and languages aside, which are not determinant to a school's funding. Furthermore, according to the executive records, geography is the only academic subject to not receive federal funding under NCLB (GENIP 2003, 1). In relation, "the disappointing geography results may partly be a consequence of the United States being the only major developed nation in which a student can pass through the K-12 public school system without being required to take a geography course" (Carano 2007, 66). The curriculum standards defined by the Department of Education provide general guidelines for a well-rounded education, yet much of the actual support is regulated by independent organizations such as the Geography Education National Implementation Project (GENIP) and individual states (Daley 1). "Nothing of value emanates from Washington, D.C. It all comes from the small prairie fires started throughout the rest of the country" (Grosvenor 1995, 411).

Many associations were created to outline and fund social studies education programs. In continuation with the example of geography, regimentation comes from the National Geography Standards; a set of guidelines created by a combination of several academic geography groups, including the Association of American Geographers and forming GENIP (Grandy and Kruger 2004, 162). They encourage geography education by providing assistance with materials, class plans and resources. Other areas of study, most recently foreign languages, have been greatly affected by budget cuts (Zehr 2011). Due to the variability of funding by the Department of Edu-

cation, they too are in danger of being limited due to an increased focus on reading and mathematics. Areas of study like social studies and foreign languages have to rely more and more on outside programs for support rather than government institutions.

Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, the federal NCLB Act required all states regularly test students in reading and mathematics (WDPI, 2011). In response to the new legislation, the state instituted the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE). In elementary schools, reading and mathematics are tested in grades three through five. Additionally, language arts, science, and social studies are tested in grade four. At the school level, North Woods is able to modify the standards already in place to meet their own goals as well as utilize their curriculum to meet the needs of WKCE and NCLB. Brauer explained that North Woods uses the state standards modified by the school district while they create their own curriculum (Brauer, 11/11/2011).

Figure 4 shows the percent of fourth grade North Woods students who scored “advanced or proficient” on the standardized tests in 2010 by subject. They are compared with the averages from the district. The data was extracted from the DPI website as a combination of the average scores on the WKCE test and the Wisconsin Academic Assessment (WAA), a standardized version of WKCE for stu-

dents with disabilities. It should be noted that two schools, Hamilton Early Learning Center and Roosevelt Elementary are not included in the district average. This is because Hamilton does not require testing as

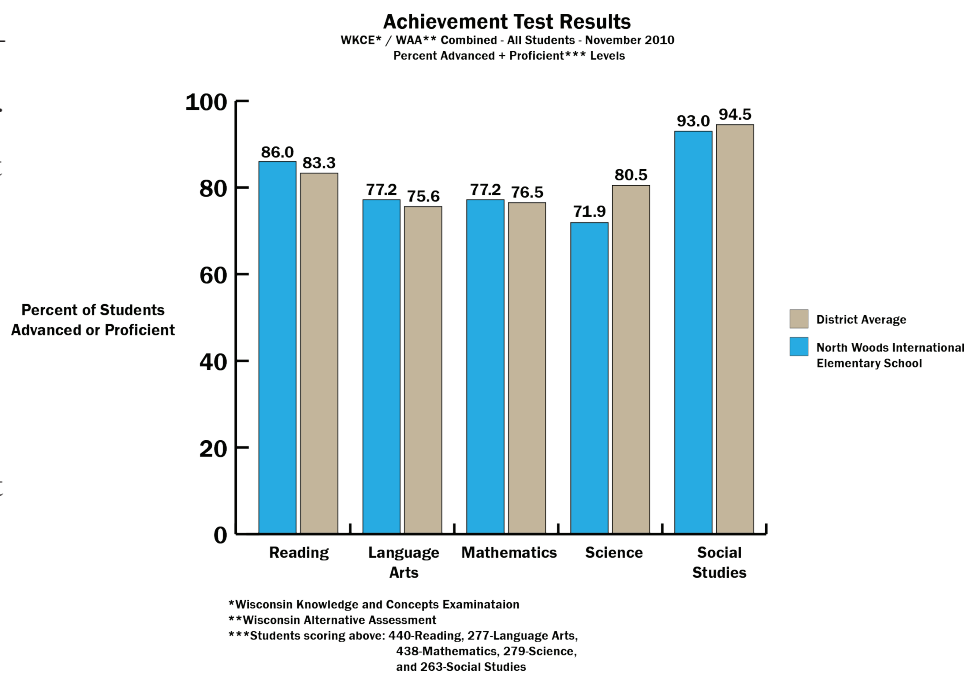


Figure 4 (Lyons, 2011)

it only goes until the 2nd grade and, for unknown reasons, data for Roosevelt is not provided by the DPI website for that year.

As shown in the graph, the scores of North Woods are competitive with the rest of the district. In fact, we learned from interviews with North Woods staff that barely any emphasis is placed on standardized testing in the curriculum. Welch expressed that while the standardized tests are a useful source to determine what skills need to be taught, teachers do not receive data until the following spring. This leaves the teacher with little time to adjust their instruction to address shortcomings in the student's achievement. NCLB has forced more standardized testing on public schools, yet North Woods continues to view it as only a minor tool (Welch, 11/11/2011). The teachers and administrators have chosen not to use standardized testing as a measure of the success of students, but rather have identified their own unique methods to quantify progress that fits their school goals (Welch, 11/11/2011).

II. Curriculum Development

The concept of international education for elementary students is a fairly new idea, so North Woods' curriculum implementation and development is a work in progress. It is constantly adapting and changing with student needs. A combination of many factors guide the development of the North Woods curriculum including state standards, multiple independent organizations' guidelines, Common Formative Assessments (CFA), and creative teacher implementation. Two components that influence this process are standards and assessment, while a main challenge is turning theories and goals into concrete lesson plans or assessment tools (Welch, 11/11/2011). As Principal, Brauer's responsibilities include building curriculum, guiding staff, working through student behavioral problems and modification of the state standard template. The latter is to better suit North Woods' goals of "understanding other countries and cultures, a value system, and understanding your own and general openness" (Brauer, 11/11/2011). A major ongoing project for Brauer is the development of an effective tool for accurate measurement of global competence and quantification of success.

According to the WDPI's *Planning a Curriculum in International Education* international education is defined as:

The infusion of global perspective into all disciplines and at all grade levels. It is not a field or separate subject in itself. Rather than a patchwork of occasional attention to the world and our connections to it, international education is a thread woven into the fabric of the entire school curriculum. (WDPI 2002, 2)

Within the United States, a few schools have dedicated themselves to forming a completely internationalized curriculum, claiming the title of an "International School". Most are charter, independent or public schools, such as North Woods International Elementary School, that rely on government funding but can plan and instill their own standards and educational material. In the United States the goal of this optional form of schooling is to prepare "American students- pre-kindergarten through college- to be citizens, workers, and leaders in the interconnected world of the 21st century" (Kagan & Stewart 2004, 229). International education encourages the implementation of material not necessarily tested within all educational subjects.

Guidelines in the form of state standards come from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) that implements a curriculum to be followed by every public school. Furthermore, they developed a guide to help international schools like North Woods identify key elements necessary to provide an international education. In the WDPI's publication *Planning Curriculum in International Education*, a teacher's implementation plan for international content is outlined:

Concepts of international education need to be integrated at every level of instruction: a first grader is not too young to understand how to solve disputes or how to count in a new language. Similarly, international education belongs in every subject area: music is rich with a universe of voices; mathematics is built upon concepts developed in the ancient times and places. While a single teacher may be familiar with global activities in her area of expertise, she may use this section to gain ideas for collaborations with the classrooms around her or classrooms abroad (Uraneck 2002, 89).

It compiles methods to gain global awareness and assist “our local beginnings [to] curve into global inquiry, dialogue and action” (WDPI 2002, vii). Techniques range from the use of food and folklore to community mapping and interaction with sister schools. Each curriculum emphasizes the transformation of educational perspectives, experiences and skills. The ultimate goal being to have students become global citizens. According to the WDPI’s International Education Recommendations:

Globally literate students can: (1) speak one or more languages in addition to English, (2) train for high skill jobs in the US or abroad, (3) find ways to travel, explore, and be creative in a culture other than their own, (4) evidence curiosity and compassion for people of other cultures, (5) solve problems by working together with others in a diverse workforce, (6) appreciate and protect the arts and nature in many places on earth (Burmaster 2005, 4).

On top of their state curriculum, North Woods integrates guidelines from several organizations to develop their international components. For example, one source for North Wood’s curriculum is The Global Competence Matrices, created by the organization EdSteps. It defines global competence as the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions to understand and act creatively and informatively on issues of global significance” (EdSteps 2010, 1). With this goal in mind, the set of matrices function as a template for educators in creating lessons and means for assessment. Four general guiding dimensions include: investigation of the world, recognize perspectives, communicate ideas, and take action. Another rubric used at North Woods quantifies these aspects through levels of integration: beginning, developing, advanced, and exemplary. Exemplary assessments include: “standardized tests, portfolios, capstone projects, or other tools of measure” (Devlin-Foltz and Singmaster, 3).

Grade Level	Concept
Kindergarten	Me
First	Family and Neighborhood
Second	People and Communities
Third	World Regions and Democracy
Fourth	Wisconsin
Fifth	United States of America

Figure 5: La Crosse District Social Studies Curriculum Emphasis (Brauer, 2011)

The school district of La Crosse’s K-5 Social Studies Program Curriculum states “social studies provides content where young people can understand the structure and processes of our society and apply their knowledge and skills to

make informal personal and social policy decisions and to adapt to changing social, political, and economic conditions” (La Crosse K-5 Social Studies Program Curriculum, 2011). The outline is broken down by grade level, with reference to what core concepts will be focused on. Within each grade, components include unit sub-topics, learner outcomes, instructional strategies, integration, suggested activities and resources, and suggested assessments.

With these guidelines for international education and global competence, along with a district-wide social studies curriculum, North Woods has developed specific measurements of success befitting their environment. Although “global competence is not against testing”, it is not the focus of curriculum development and accessing student growth at North Woods (Brauer, 11/11/2011). One tool used at North Woods is the Professional Learning Communities (PLC). They are composed of multiple teachers, led by a team leader and meet once a month to focus on curriculum goals, training, data collection and accountability. PLCs also create and implement Common Formative Assessments (CFAs). These tests are a form of standardization and are given every unit to all students in the same grade. Although no scores are given, it is used to assess effectiveness of teaching and to determine what needs to be altered. Collaboration between teachers allows for a stronger formation of teaching methods. According to Welch, time becomes a challenge in developing these tests for every unit. However, it has been a “great model” and allows teachers to have flexibility in how they implement material (Welch, 11/11/2011).

An additional tool is the “Linguafolio”, specifically designed to follow student proficiency in language studies. It is an evaluation handout North Woods created to track the Spanish language skills of the students enrolled in the immersion program. The assessment involves the student’s ability to use Spanish vocabulary and grammar in daily classroom activities. For every quarter of the academic year, students are orally evaluated by the teacher who then fills out the Linguafolio rubric to show areas of progress and need for improvement. Teachers grade on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 considered “advanced”. The list contains different properties students should be able to identify with the last category being “I can compare my life in the United States to life in another country” (Linguafolio handout). This academic measurement tool assess

not only the language abilities of students, a big aspect of North Woods, but also the student's capacity to connect globally.

These alternative measures allow teachers to creatively incorporate goals and skills into the curriculum. After administrators make the necessary changes to state and national guidelines, it is upon the teachers and other support staff to place it in the classroom. In keeping with the school's stated goals, much of this implementation includes finding ways to keep their curriculum internationalized.

III. Staff Implementation

At North Woods, institutional support for internationalization is ubiquitous, whether in school wide programs or broken down into grade level appropriate learning. Each year, instruction is separated into two semesters. One focuses on the grade levels' appointed sister city and the second on an assigned nation within a continent picked as the theme for the semester. These two grade level assignments drive many of the lessons that teachers create for their students. The




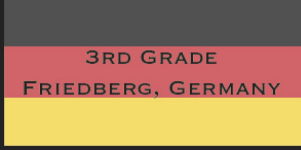


 <p>KINDERGARTEN LUOYANG, CHINA</p>	 <p>1ST GRADE FØRDE, NORWAY</p>
 <p>2ND GRADE BANTRY, IRELAND</p>	 <p>3RD GRADE FRIEDBERG, GERMANY</p>
 <p>4TH GRADE DUBNA, RUSSIA</p>	 <p>5TH GRADE EPINAL, FRANCE</p>

Figure 6: Grade Level sister city pairings
(Brauer, 2011)

sister cities are paired with each grade as follows:

These connections allows teachers to focus on a specific culture or country when internationalizing their lesson plans. Kindergarten teachers may focus on studying panda bears in their science curriculum, or introduce the Zodiac Calendar in their logic/mathematics teachings. As students grow and their

ability to comprehend concepts expands, teachers begin to install a deeper understanding of a place or culture. In 5th grade, these connections to sister cities include projects such as finding pen pals and "skyping" with people in Epinal, France or building table top dioramas of Paris including the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, and the Louvre. Though the sister cities are an impor-

tant guide, teachers are not restricted to this paradigm as a means of internationalization. North Woods frequently host international visitors who provide an opportunity for personal interaction and exchange. Welch explained their ‘Passport for Learning booklets’, which are utilized whenever a foreign visitor comes into the classroom. It includes learning about basic cultural aspects such as language or geography, but also delves deeper into ceremonial attire, cuisine, or how free time is spent. “The passport booklet is a way to make the visit a worthwhile educational experience, even if they come in for ten minutes. It is system to approaching real life you don’t get thrown off when you hear something in the news, rather you connect and have the ability to recognize” (Welch, 11/11/2011).

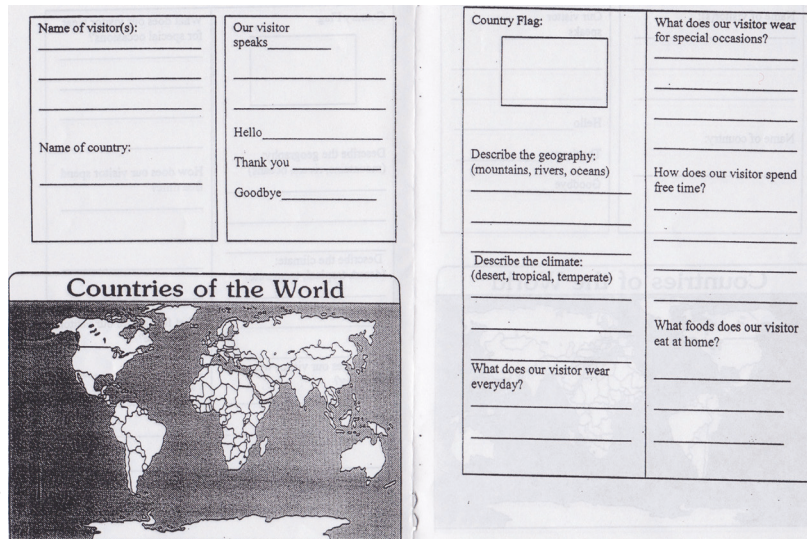


Figure 7: A page from the “Passport to Learning Book (Welch, 2011)

The other semester focuses on a grade’s country for an end-of-the-year “Festival of Nations.” Each year, a particular region is the topic of focus and every grade level is assigned a country within that region. 2010 was Australia/Oceania and this year, 2011, concentrates on South America. Each grade becomes ‘experts’ in their given country and then teaches the rest of the school about their country at the end of the semester celebration (Welch, 11/11/2011). This serves for some informative decor throughout the school. As visitors walk around, there are maps of Argentina on doors, the Brazilian flag hung over a classroom and children’s locker name tags written on Peruvian or Chilean flags. Common spaces, such the library, are not immune to this decoration, as it is stocked with books focusing on each of the emphasized countries. For Linda Watson, the internationalization provides a challenge. As the school’s LMC director, Watson’s two main roles in facilitating global competence are “filling the gaps of the structured curricu-



Figure 8: The Hungry Caterpillar on display in the LMC. A collection of Hebrew, Norwegian, Japanese, German, and French versions. (Schroeder et al, 2011)

lum” and “looking for material to supplement learning” (Watson, 11/11/2011). She accomplishes this by searching for age appropriate books, computer programs, and iPod/iPad apps which students and teachers can utilize to expand their knowledge base about their selected country.

Beyond these specific grade level assignments and LMC resources, teachers have the ability to check out and utilize “culture kits” in their lesson plans. As indicated on Figure 17, these kits expand across the globe and contain many different objects native to their respective countries or regions. Culture kits have been built steadily since 2006 and continue to be expanded upon. In order to put together these learning tools, the school provides funds to individuals associated with the school who travel abroad. They are encouraged to purchase any interesting

and educational cultural artifacts that will expand students’ abilities to understand concepts. Materials have been compiled by a variety of people; administrators, teachers, individual families, and even friends who have a connection to the school. These are necessary additions,



Figure 9: A portion of the wall of Culture Kits (Schroeder, 2011)

Brauer claims, as “it is important for kids to see and touch”

what they are learning (Brauer, 11/11/2011).



Figures 10 & 11: Culture Kit contents from Russia and Kenya. (Schroeder, 2011)

Internationalization also occurs in school clubs and other activities at North Woods. Nadia Hindelah has incorporated many different international plays into her drama club program, for example, the production of *Hansel and Gretel* in 2010. Hindelah stated this as an example of how students observe their teachers learning with them, a crucial element of North Woods. ‘I didn’t know any German before the play, so I learned along with my students’ (Hindelah, 11/11/2011). She emphasized how important it was for the students as it demonstrates that their teachers are still excited to learn. Previous productions have been adaptations of Chinese and French theater. She is currently attempting a play from South America to be put on during the school’s Festival of Nations. Another example of learning outside the classroom is the construction of a peace garden outside the main entrance. It includes six statues with tiles made by students representing their sister cities and an obelisk with “May Peace Prevail on Earth” inscribed in 16 different languages. In building this garden, students incorporated plants native to their sister cities, learning about their climate and local flora.

Another very important aspect of North Woods is the Spanish immersion program. International schools wholly devoted to international education often approach this idea of creating an environment to “engage teachers and students in learning about other world regions, cultures and languages” (Kagan & Stewart 2004, 234) through a curriculum founded on foreign language.

Seattle's John Stanford International School and San Francisco's Chinese American International School are two pioneering bilingual immersion elementary schools, the former focusing on Spanish or Japanese and the later on Chinese. Each build off traditional language studies to produce different cultural experiences (Sachar 2004, 16) and incorporate international themes throughout all subjects (Kagan & Stewart 2004, 234). Morikami Park Elementary School in Florida uses the International Baccalaureate guidelines and a Spanish dominant program to explore "who we are, where we are in time and place, how we express ourselves, how the world works, how we organize ourselves and sharing the planet" (Sachar 2004, 36).

Unlike other schools, North Woods is not part of the International Baccalaureate program because of expenses, a strict curriculum and training guide, which would provide too many restrictions (Watson, 11/11/2011). However, North Woods has implemented a Spanish Immersion Program. Families can choose to have their children taught half the day exclusively in Spanish and the other half in English in grades K-3. Learning a foreign language early in life is important for many reasons. "Children who begin early appear to develop better oral proficiency and to feel more secure in their oral performance. Early learners may also have comparative advantages in relation to their monolingual peers with respect to cognitive development, academic achievement, and attitudes toward the target language and culture" (Dominguez and Pessola 2005, 474). Due to U.S. population trends, learning Spanish in particular is fundamental. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 Community survey, 19.7% of all people over the age of five spoke a language other than English in their homes. Of those, 62.3% or 34,547,077 of people spoke Spanish (U.S Census Bureau, 2010). Students participating in this program have an advantage over the rest when dealing with this large



Figure 12: Peace obelisk at school's front entrance. (Schroeder, 2011)



Figure 13: Spanish Immersion case outside school LMC (Schroeder, 2011)

segment of the U.S. population. The immersion program will be expanded to 4th and 5th grades starting next year as students currently involved in the program move on to higher grades. For those already learning Spanish at North Woods, the Linguafolio becomes the main facilitator in providing a quantitative assessment of their language skills.

Public schools with traditional separation of foreign language studies and other subject areas have developed different approaches to expand global curriculums. Experimental programs have been implemented at the local level with the intention to generate federal action and move away from a funding concentration on reading and math (Kagan & Stewart 2004, 233). To counter the lack of geography education, programs such as “Geoliteracy” and “GeoMath” integrate geography within the high stakes tested areas. For example, Arizona’s GeoMath Grade K-8 program features lesson plans developed by teachers with supplemental help from geography professionals and resulted in statistical improvement of math skills (Dorn et al. 2005, 152). These programs are discussed in depth in many articles focusing on international education in the United States.

At North Woods, the integration of global concepts and core subjects are done on an individual basis, rather than school-wide programs. For example, Hindelah uses her first language, Arabic, as a creative way to explore numbers in math class. She also uses global time zones and

different units of measurement to further the integration of mathematics in a global world (Hindelah, 11/11/2011). Through these methods, North Woods has modified its curriculum enormously to provide students with the skills needed for the ever globalized work force which they will someday join (Brauer, 11/11/2011). However, positive student response is just as important as successful internationalization, otherwise North Woods' objectives are void of meaning.

IV. Student Response

With many different methods to evaluate success in an international school atmosphere, what do the students take away from their North Woods schooling and what is its impact on their educational experiences and lives? Welch thinks her students benefit from learning about other cultures at such a young age. "When I see my North Woods kids meet foreign people, they are so open. It breaks down the barrier from 'oh, that's so weird' to normalcy. After awhile, it is not something strange" (Welch, 11/11/2011). The variety and frequency of interaction between foreign visitors and students helps them understand and experience diversity. Classroom visits are "small, intimate and welcoming", creating an environment more conducive to learning than presentations in front of a wider audience (Welch, 11/11/2011). With the help of the 'Passport to Learning booklet', students find more respectable terminology to express their thoughts when confronted with difference, rather than using offensive language such as "weird." This seemingly small act learned in a classroom is of huge importance when considered on a larger scale. The hope is that learning how to approach someone who is different, as a child, leads to a tolerant adult.

Among the many problems of the nation's public schools system, bullying has recently risen to the top of the list. "Bullying" is defined as "a subset of aggression



Figure 14: Student artwork sample (Schroeder, 2011)

with three components: (a) intent to harm, (b) repetition, and (c) a power imbalance between the bully and the target or victim” (Bauman 2008, 1). A study done by the American Medical Association showed that 29.9% of [American] students in grades 6 through 10 reported “moderate or frequent” involvement in bullying (Nansel et al. 2001, 2). Although these children are in elementary school, the data is relevant because learning positive social skills earlier in life can ultimately impact future interactions and decisions. Such harassment as bullying can have serious psychological, emotional and physical effects on an individual that can remain with them for a lifetime. In light of the string of teen suicides in 2010 related to high school bullying, prevention has become a priority for school administrators and teachers. However, at North Woods Elementary, bullying does not seem to be a problem. Hindelah, who is from Lebanon and used to “be the only one around with brown eyes and brown hair,” noted the reservations of a small town (Hindelah 11/11/2011). Yet, she says that North Woods contrasts that by creating an environment open to diversity. “Minorities might be considered different in some schools. Not at North Woods” (Hindelah 11/11/2011). She emphasized the school’s goal to create “global citizens”, and not ones separated by imaginary boundaries. This thought was repeated by Welch, who stated “I want my kids to be raised with the idea of being human and not seeing others as ‘those people’” (Welch, 11/11/2011).

The international atmosphere of North Woods lays the foundation for building open-mindedness at a young age. These students learn how to accept people who may look, act, sound, or dress differently because it is a normal interaction at school. North Woods brings all the cultures of the world to one location which opens eyes to diversity and teaches the importance of tolerance. For children on the verge of entering middle school, a vortex of struggles concerning image and identity, tolerance towards others will be a shield for some against teenage obstacles. Ultimately, the goal of North Woods is to produce graduates who will have the tools to be successful in a culturally different world, which also includes an understanding of their own.

The sister cities of North Woods Elementary School are essential in the attempt to “estab-

lish a friendship with other cultures” which influences how children perceive their own culture.

“Children become aware that culture is something complicated. The idea is to look at your culture first and then expand onto others” (Welch, 11/11/2011). Watson emphasizes the need to “think globally, act locally”

(Watson, 11/11/2011). By starting with observation and a critique of one’s culture, children can have a better understanding of other’s lives. One example of this is the “Carbon Footprint Guide” every foreign visitor completes after visiting the school. They calculate



Figure 15: Billboard in 3rd grade classroom with sister city and Festival of Nations clocks. (Schroeder, 2011)

the amount of carbon released by their country of origin and then

students compare with the figures they already calculated for the United States. As Welch notes, the United States has always had a bigger carbon footprint than any of the represented nations.

“It makes global warming more of a reality for these children” (Welch, 11/11/2011). The hands-on work not only creates awareness of global issues, but also provides insight to the culture of consumerism and capitalism in the United States. The idea is to “use the concept of an ‘Ecological Footprint’ as a way to teach children that their every day decisions and activities have an effect on our world climate” (Welch, Footprint Curriculum handout). It is the hope that students realize “how your culture influences you” as well as others (Welch ,11/11/2011).

North Woods teachers also use awareness of self to encourage service learning. Watson says the goal of this type of instruction is to show that “we are here as a society to help each other” (Watson, 11/11/2011). She gives the example of a book 5th grade students read entitled “The Family under the Bridge”; a story about a homeless family in Paris. The book drew a connection with their sister city in France and introduced the reality of homelessness as a global

phenomenon. After completing the book, a discussion was conducted about homelessness in their communities and ways to provide assistance to resolve the issue (Watson, 11/11/2011). The students then ran a donation drive for the Salvation Army to address awareness on a local level. On a more global scale, students also run a fundraiser during the holiday season for Heifer International, a non-profit organization that gives livestock to families struggling with poverty in different corners of the world (Watson, 11/11/2011). With the help of curriculum materials for global awareness, students use what they learn about the problems in other countries to reflect upon their nation's own and what they can do as members of society. In this way, students use a global perspective to explore their own culture and its problems which can lead to positive action like service.

Aside from measuring global competence through academic assessments, it is difficult to scientifically prove that students at North Woods will be more prepared for the future than students from more traditional elementary schools. However, a lot can be learned from experiments already tested at the school. For example, Western Technical College's nutrition students did a food survey in 2010 comparing North Woods with Summit Elementary, another school in the La Crosse district. The experiment consisted of having 5th grade students complete a survey on their willingness to try different foods from around the world and whether or not they think ethnic food should be offered daily for school lunch. The results proved to be positive for North Woods in that 91% of its participants indicated they desired ethnic food to be available at school compared to the 77% at Summit (Varnum, 2010). There was also a higher percentage of North Woods students who "loved to try new food" and understood that it taught them "about culture and people from other countries" (33.8% at North Woods versus 28.6% at Summit and 15.4% at North Woods versus 12.2% at Summit respectively) (Varnum, 2010). The survey concludes that those at North Woods have a greater enthusiasm to try foods they are not accustomed to than students from other schools, which is due to their internationalized curriculum. "Our goal [with this kind of survey] is that they will bring this diversity out" says Watson (Watson, 11/11/2011). Outside of the context of food, the survey shows that North Woods cultivates students to be risk-

takers, knowing that it will be beneficial to them in the future. As the job market becomes more globally diverse and competitive, a simple food survey can show that elementary school students encouraged to take chances will have a higher probability of being open to change and adaptation in their professional adult life.

Future Research

There were many elements of this project that could have been further elaborated on. The most evident is the lack of information on the other public elementary schools of the La Crosse district. Due to time restrictions, the project developed into a case study rather than a comparison between North Woods and the rest of the public schools options as had been originally planned. The sheer amount of material required to complete an investigation on how the other nine schools address, or do not address, education for global competence was not compatible with the time frame given for this assignment. In addition to secondary material, the number of interviews and primary sources necessary to give an accurate description of the educational situation would have been overwhelming for a project with limitations in time and funds. Thus, in order to have a focused and detailed research project, we chose to only look at North Woods as a unique local school with an emphasis on international education. Should the circumstances for the project been different, further research on other schools in the district would have revealed important insight on what kind of education La Crosse elementary students are receiving from those available and why.

Another aspect that limited research was the inability to interact with the students. Since the purpose of the case study is to reveal the benefits of international education on young students, the lack of face-to-face interaction and observation was a key component of our assignment that is missing due to legal constraints. Our methods were limited to interviews with teachers and staff that only represent a portion of the population affected by this institution. If interviews or surveys had been conducted with students, more detailed information on student opinions and response about North Woods could have been extracted. Also, with more time, tracking students'

long term progress could reveal future academic and social development resulting from the North Woods schooling structure. Other populations missing from the research are student teachers at North Woods and members of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. The possibility of interacting with student teachers presented itself during the interview process, which could have resulted in an “outsider’s” view of North Woods. In addition, interviewees mentioned the extreme importance of the school’s connection with the local university as a means of extracting multi-cultural visitors and Spanish instructors. With more time, research on the university connection would have provided information on the necessary elements of the local environment that make an international school, like North Woods, function.

Considering that the object of our study is a two-hour drive away and that we are undergraduates restricted in time and funds, we were only able to make one trip to visit North Woods. We were not able to observe classes or conduct many interviews due to a time limitation for ourselves and our interviewees. If we had had the opportunity, classroom observation and interviews with the entire faculty would have provided more examples and details on the North Woods curriculum implementation. Lastly, we were not able to take an in-depth look at the school’s Spanish immersion program beyond what was mentioned in interviews or secondary material given to us by faculty. Again, the lack of time did not allow us to observe first-hand the Spanish immersion program, and more importantly, how well the students receive it. Future research on our project would involve extended time and funding to conduct a more extensive approach to how North Woods incorporates the outside world into its classrooms through language tools or visitors as well as student response in comparison to other district public schools.

Conclusion

Within the context of recent federal programs such as NCLB, student academic success is defined as a score on a standardized exam. This has created the potential for a knowledge gap between the subjects that determine a school district’s funding and those that do not. Social studies and foreign languages are at risk of falling behind as schools decide to focus their efforts

on reading and mathematics. While North Woods International School is bound by this paradigm like any other, they have successfully incorporated geography and cultural studies into the district's established curriculum. To do so, they have created different measures of success, like CFAs and the Linguafolio, with regards to becoming globally competent.

The state of Wisconsin creates educational standards which the district then takes and modifies to fit their needs. Teachers receive this integrated curriculum and largely have the freedom to implement it in their classes as they wish. In the case of North Woods, this means internationalizing the material to make it applicable to the school goal of achieving global competence. These tools include continuous reworking of CFAs to better fit objectives of global education matrices provided by outside educational sources. In the future, North Woods intends to create its own global competence assessment to quantify student success. The end of the year Festival of Nations along with sister city interaction and many more school-wide initiatives are all methods the teachers of North Woods have implemented to achieve the goal of creating globally competent students.

et, possibly the most important aspect of North Woods is the fact that students are gaining without losing. An outsider might be critical of the school's goals which do not pay any more attention to reading and mathematics than other subjects such as geography and foreign languages, even though the latter are not frequented on standardized tests. Negative feedback might imply reading and mathematics are being overcrowded by other subjects, therefore these children could not possibly be getting an adequate education in them. Of course, reading and mathematics are very important and North Woods does its duty in properly providing a well-rounded education. As noted in Figure 4, the students of North Woods do just as average as the rest of the La Crosse district schools on standardized tests. Thus, they are clearly receiving the appropriate instruction, yet it is the way they receive it that is so unique. By making connections, teaching in a different language or using resources from other countries, the required material gets across to the student within a global context. They are expected to not only learn the information, but be able to apply it to their lives and others on a larger scale. Considering the array of benefits interna-

tional education has to offer, it poses the question why more public elementary institutions across the country have not adapted this mode of schooling.

Based on the global breadth of their curriculum, those that graduate from North Woods have a higher chance of being successful in an increasingly globalized world professionally, academically and socially. The school's atmosphere is one of tolerance where students learn to accept others who are different than them. Although tolerance may be encouraged at other elementary schools, North Woods explicitly places it within the classroom. Students grow up ready to take risks and understand the benefits of being open to new experiences. As Welch eloquently stated, "Our world is global now. These children will be working globally and we can't deny that. I want my kids to be raised with the idea of being human and not seeing others as 'those people.' When I watch the news, I think, 'what can I do?' But I can teach kids to care" (11/11/2011).

FOSTERING GLOBAL EDUCATION

Festival of Nations, Culture Kits, and Sister Cities of North Woods International Elementary School



Sources:
North Woods International Elementary School, 2011
Natural Earth Data

Figure 16 (Dorsch, 2011)

Appendix A: North Woods Principal Interview Questions

1. What is your position at North Woods? The school district as a whole?
2. How long have you served with the district?/North Woods?/as principal?
3. What are your primary duties?
4. In what ways do you influence the curriculum that is taught in the classrooms?
5. How does your role as an administrator dovetail with your role as principal? Do some ideas for North Woods make their way into a wider curriculum? (specifically administrative policies, curriculum topics, teaching practices etc.) Vice versa?
6. In what ways do you influence the classroom curriculum?
7. What is unique about North Wood's environment and focus? How do you achieve this?
8. What characteristics and/or experiences are needed in staff for an international school? Is special training required?
9. What is the screening process for admission? Is there a target population? What characteristics are most important?
10. What does the phrase "global competence" mean to you with respect to the goals outlined in the school profile?
11. What are tools that are available to your disposal in forming global citizens of students?
12. How do national standardized tests affect an international school and curriculum?
13. Does North Woods measure "success" differently than other schools? If so, how?
14. What kind of influence do you think going to North Woods will have on the futures of the students, both professionally and socially?

Appendix B: North Woods Staff:

1. What is your position/Title?
2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching at North Woods?
3. Have you taught in other schools in the district? If yes, where?
4. What primary duties are you responsible for?
5. What special training, if any, have you received in order to teach at North Woods?
6. What influence do you have on the curriculum content/implementation/creation?
7. How do you prepare your students to meet standardized testing requirements?
8. How do you measure success in an international school setting?
9. What makes the North Woods classroom different from a “traditional” elementary classroom?
10. What does the phrase “global competence” mean to you with respect to the goals outlined in the school profile?
11. How well do your students adapt to new cultures or ideas?
12. What challenges does teaching for global confidence pose?
13. How do you develop global citizens your students? Can you share a classroom story that shows how a North Woods lesson plan fostered global citizenship?
14. Why is it important that young children become “global citizens”?

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