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Reshaping High Schools Pages 58-62

High Schools in the Global Age

International Studies Schools prepare minority and low-income high school students not only to attend college, but also to succeed as citizens of the world.

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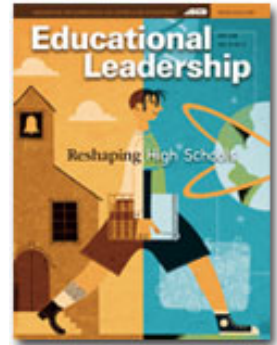
The 2006 ground breaking for the Vaughn International Studies Academy (VISA) in the poverty-blighted community of Pacoima, California, was cause for celebration. VISA is the 9–12 extension of the Vaughn 21st Century Learning Center, a preK–8 charter school that has achieved remarkable success in accelerating the achievement of its low-income Latino students. VISA was created to be the capstone of their journey, not only preparing them for college but also ensuring that they develop the broad knowledge of the world that would help them succeed in the 21st-century global environment. Amid the festivities, a reporter asked, "But why do *those* kids need to know about the world?"

The assumption behind the reporter's question was clear. It's sufficiently difficult to boost low-income minority students' academic outcomes enough to get them into college. Why bother to teach them about the world beyond U.S. borders? VISA, however, is one of a national network of 13 international studies schools that are challenging that outdated assumption.

New Needs for All Students

Two intertwined imperatives face U.S. education today. The first is addressing the problem of persistent underachievement, particularly among minority and low-income students. The second is preparing students for work and civic roles in a globalized environment, where success increasingly requires the ability to compete, connect, and cooperate on an international scale.

More than one in five U.S. jobs are now tied to international trade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). According to the Committee for Economic Development (2006), U.S. employers will "increasingly need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures" to work effectively with partners around the globe (p. 2). The nature of work itself is changing, too. As more routine jobs can be done by computer or outsourced to cheaper labor markets, the economic advantage will go to workers who can analyze and solve problems, recognize patterns and similarities, and communicate and interact with other people, especially those who do not share the worker's culture (Gårdenfors, 2007; Levy & Murnane, 2007).



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Globalization is about more than employment, though. Virtually every major social issue people face—from global warming to terrorism—has an international dimension (Stewart, 2007). Information technologies enable cross-cultural communication at the click of a mouse. And with 185–200 million migrants worldwide (Suárez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007), migration and immigration are creating societies that are enormously diverse, both culturally and linguistically. Deep knowledge about other cultures, sophisticated communication skills, and the disposition to interact positively with individuals from varied backgrounds are the foundations of work and citizenship in the 21st century.

Many U.S. students are currently unprepared for the demands and opportunities of a global economy. Most vulnerable are disadvantaged youth, whom schools have historically shortchanged. The No Child Left Behind Act's focus on closing the basic-skills achievement gap is only a first step toward the goal of creating equal educational opportunity. What all students need—including *those* students at VISA and millions like them—is rigorous, world-wise intellectual engagement that develops nimble thinking skills. Unfortunately, instructional practice driven by today's standardized tests is unlikely to meet this need.

International Studies Schools

Since 2003, with initial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Asia Society has partnered with school districts and charter authorities to create the International Studies Schools Network (ISSN), a national network of design-driven schools with the core mission of developing college-ready, globally competent high school graduates. The network currently includes 13 schools in urban and rural communities across the United States. ISSN schools serve students in grades 6–12 or 9–12; 85 percent of all students served by network schools are minorities, and 74 percent are from low-income families.

Global Knowledge and Skills Throughout the Curriculum

At the heart of the International Studies Schools Network design is the reframing of traditional courses and the development of new ones to systematically integrate knowledge about the world and skills to understand how that world works. The design does not simply add an international frosting on top of existing practice, nor does it implement a one-size-fits-all international studies curriculum in every network school. Rather, the network provides detailed course frameworks, exemplary curriculum units, and intensive professional development in a curriculum planning process. The goal is to build teachers' capacity for thoughtfully infusing international content and perspectives within rigorous, engaging coursework that addresses state content and performance standards.

Science courses, for example, are taught through the lens of world problems. In Christopher Chieh's biochemistry class at the College of Staten Island High School for International Studies, students examine issues of hunger and food scarcity in the world through labs that explore the energy value of various foods. In Greg Kuhr's field biology class at the Metropolitan Learning Center in Bloomfield, Connecticut, students design experiments with tropical fish to explore how changes in ecosystems can affect wild animal populations worldwide.

Science courses also offer the opportunity for students to study with peers in other countries, just as working scientists do. Several network schools involve students in international scientific projects focusing on climate change, water conservation, species extinction, and other global issues through the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN), which enables students and teachers to use the Internet and other technologies to collaborate on projects.

Social studies courses are fertile ground for developing deep content knowledge and strong reasoning skills by connecting the local to the global and the past to the future. For example, students consider the theme of "conflict and healing" as they study the civil rights movement in U.S. history and then compare it to the Truth and Reconciliation processes of South Africa and Chile. As part of a unit on World War II, students debate when a country should go to war, arguing from the perspective of the Japanese in the months leading up to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and then apply their new understanding to the United States' decision to adopt a doctrine of preemptive war in Iraq.

One important goal in such courses is to examine the broad range of national and international determinants and consequences of events—to understand that people and nations may legitimately hold different perspectives on world issues. At the International School of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, all sophomore students participate in a Model United Nations experience that requires them to thoroughly research and represent in debate a country's position on an important world issue. Student Elizabeth McLeod describes her experience:

One year I represented Iran, and Iran's official position on women at the time was not my official position on women, I can tell you. So, by using Model United Nations as a tool, you can teach students to take the position of a country whose views may not necessarily be their own.

English language arts courses are internationalized by expanding the traditional canon of literature to include works from around the world and by teaching students methods of literary analysis that illuminate common themes and differences across cultures. The ISSN has created a 9th grade world literature course focused on how individual identity—a topic of high interest to 14-year-olds—is created and manifested in different cultures. Literature from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the United States provides hundreds of coming-of-age stories, fables, and works of nonfiction. The course incorporates intensive literacy-development skills to support the many students who enter network schools well below grade level in reading and writing.

At the College of Staten Island High School for International Studies, students' writing takes on an international dimension through the award-winning *International Insider*, the student-run newspaper created in collaboration with student reporters around the globe using an Internet blog and e-mail. Senior editor Anan Baig says that the paper, which provides student perspectives on tough issues from genocide in Darfur to the war in Iraq, "is a chance to explore the world one teenager at a time."

Connecting language arts to science, social studies, or other subject areas provides an engaging interdisciplinary approach for deepening students' global knowledge and

perspectives. At the International School of the Americas, a unit on global environmental problems connects students' study of environmental issues in biology with their study of sustainable development in world geography, and links both concepts with their reading of Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, which posits a world where humankind coexists peacefully with nature rather than dominating it. The culminating assessment requires student teams, in a simulated congressional hearing, to propose a research-based solution to a serious environmental challenge.

Authentic Language Learning

All network schools provide students with the opportunity to study a language other than English throughout their school career, and each school offers at least one Asian language. Language classes engage students continually in speaking and writing in the target language to share information, ideas, opinions, and emotions on engaging topics. Language learning also provides a vehicle for helping students understand the behaviors, norms, and traditions of everyday life in other cultures. For example, the Denver Center for International Studies offers Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Spanish, and French to students in grades 6–12. The school provides virtually all language instruction in the target language itself. Frequent World Language Days allow students to hone their language skills through purposeful conversations with native-language speakers in local Chinese markets, Spanish-language media outlets, local Hispanic cultural organizations, Asian fairs, and other community settings. Student-planned World Cafés engage families and community members in the cultures of the languages taught, with students taking on the role of teacher.

To sharpen language skills and cultural understanding and empower students to act with confidence on the world stage, each school aims to give every student the opportunity for international travel. Experiencing life in other regions is especially important for disadvantaged students because it helps them envision their own global future.

Small Schools, Engaged Communities

All ISSN schools are small—roughly 120 students at each grade level. Because positive relationships with trusted adults motivate students to learn (Jackson & Davis, 2000), each school has an advisory component as part of a commitment to develop a nurturing, relationship-driven environment.

Close connection to families and links to organizations outside the school are a basic part of the ISSN school design. The diversity of students' family backgrounds provides a major asset that supports schools' inclusive international cultures. At the International Studies Learning Center in South Gate, California, near south central Los Angeles, many of the students are of Mexican heritage, which prompted Principal Guillermina Jauregui to have students, staff, and parents read *Burro Genius* by Victor Villaseñor. The book provided the foundation for schoolwide discourse examining the influence of culture and the diversity of students' needs. Students read the book during advisory periods using interactive reading strategies; parents discussed it with their children in relation to their own experiences; and the author gave a presentation to the school community in which he encouraged people to write their own personal stories.

Universities and community colleges support the schools' global mission by offering college courses that tap international expertise and by providing professional development opportunities for teachers, especially through Area Studies Centers whose mission is, in part, to support K–12 classroom teachers. Like several other ISSN schools, the International Studies Learning Center partners with a local institution, Los Angeles Southwest Community College, to offer college-level coursework. More than 80 percent of the school's juniors, who will be the first senior class next year, are currently taking one or more college-level courses.

Business, cultural, and nonprofit organizations are especially important to the network schools' mission, providing educational resources and important opportunities for internships and community service. Through a partnership with the World Affairs Council of Houston, for example, students at the Houston Academy for International Studies had a dinner discussion with former Secretary of State Colin Powell on contemporary world challenges and solutions. As a requirement for graduation, every student at the International School of the Americas in San Antonio interns at a globally focused organization, ranging from Doctors Without Borders, to the Mexican Consulate in San Antonio, to the Volkswagen manufacturing plant in Pueblo, Mexico.

Promising Results

How well are ISSN schools achieving their mission of producing college-ready, globally competent students? Although limited by their focus on relatively low-level skills, state tests are nevertheless a useful baseline assessment of students' progress. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education analyzed data on network schools from 2004 to 2007, comparing results from these schools with those for schools with similar demographic profiles within the same school district. Across grade levels and core subject areas (English, math, science, social studies/economics), ISSN schools achieved at higher levels in the vast majority of such comparisons. For example, the Academy of International Studies in Charlotte, North Carolina, which opened in 2004, has outpaced the district average and comparison school scores on almost every end-of-course exam given during the past three years. Virtually 100 percent of the school's first senior class is on track to graduate on time in 2008. Although there is certainly room for improvement—and each school is on a journey—ISSN schools are achieving encouraging results on the assessments that are "coin of the realm" in the era of No Child Left Behind.

However, the International Studies Schools Network is also working in partnership with Stanford University and Envisions Schools to develop a digital portfolio assessment system that will provide a better gauge of whether students are truly prepared for college success and global citizenship. We hope to develop an authentic assessment system that drives the nature and quality of instruction by asking students to show what they know through real-world applications of knowledge.

The term *globalization* has taken on many meanings, but one fact is indisputable—we now live in an interconnected and interdependent world. Our mission must be to fully prepare every young person for the challenges and opportunities he or she will face within the new global

village. The International Studies Schools Network is designed to do just that.

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Author's Note: See www.asiasociety.org/education for information on the Asia Society's International Studies Schools Network, including online lesson plans and information about the upcoming conference in Washington, D. C., "Putting the World into World-Class Education: A National Forum for Policymakers and Practitioners."

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