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Reflections on five Schools: Education and Social Justice

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Chapter 6

The Context: The Global Education Seminar

By Kathryn Kinnucan-Welsch

Abstract: During the 2012 – 2013 academic year, seven faculty engaged in reading, reflection, and conversations with themselves and others as part of the Global Education Seminar, a faculty development program designed to support intercultural and global initiatives. The seminar culminated in a three-week trip to Argentina and Peru, during which the cohort visited schools, universities, and the streets of Buenos Aires and Lima. The stories of five schools, some affluent, some located in the midst of poverty, offer a window into the intersection of education and social justice. The stories offer food for thought around three themes: 1) social justice is embedded in the very fabric of the schools; 2) teaching English is a social justice project; and 3) direct experiences in unfamiliar settings have the potential to transform how we teach others.

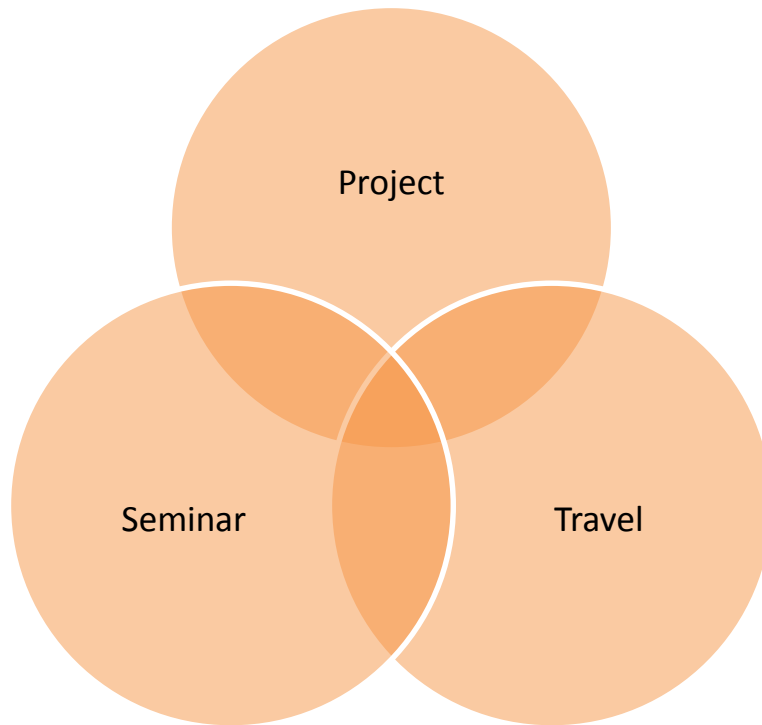
On May 13, 2013, seven faculty from the University of Dayton gathered in B terminal at the Dayton International Airport for what was to become one of the most challenging, fulfilling, and memorable experiences of my life. Treavor Bogard, a member of the group, and I sat in the airport chatting about our efforts to “pack light,” our anticipation of the experiences in countries unfamiliar to us, and the apprehension that comes with traveling to the unfamiliar. During the lulls in the conversation, my thoughts drifted to one afternoon in the spring of 2012 when the Global Education Seminar Planning Team was discussing who would facilitate Cohort 3 of the Global Education Seminar. At some point in the conversation, I spoke up and offered to serve as facilitator or co-facilitator for the 2012-2013 seminar. That moment was captured in one of those episodic memories in which one can recall visual images of the moment, the way the sun was filtering through the windows of Rike Hall 207, where the members of the planning team were sitting, and the discussion of next steps that would finalize a decision. One year later, Cohort 3 of the Global Education Seminar, assembled one by one, and settled into a space we carved out in the boarding area to wait for the announcement for American Airlines Flight 1397 for Dallas, continuing to Buenos Aires, Argentina. And so, our journey began. Well, not really . . .

The Global Education Seminar Cohort 3 journey began on August 30, 2012. It was on that date that the cohort met as an entire group for the first in a series of three- hour sessions that are an integral part of the Global Education Seminar. On May 13, 2013, the group departed for South America, but that departure represented a culminating activity of a year of exploration of the culture and contemporary reality of two countries, Argentina and Peru. To fully understand the stories of the faculty experiences during the trip to South America, it is important to understand the context in which the trip occurred.

The Global Education Seminar is a faculty development program at the University of Dayton supported by the Provost, Academic Deans, and the Center for International Programs. Faculty members are nominated for participation by the deans of their respective units, with support from the department chairpersons. The nomination process includes the submission of a proposal by faculty which describes what the faculty member would like to accomplish through participation and how those goals align with the goals of the program.

The program is described as follows in a handout distributed to the participants:

The Global Education Seminar is comprised of three interconnected elements:



These three elements work together to support the objectives of the program:

- familiarize a growing body of UD faculty, who formerly have had little international experience, with selected international locations as sites for academic exploration and study;
- strengthen the University’s current network of international resources and relationships, which can enrich and support curriculum revision, motivate new scholarly projects, and expand international faculty exchanges and grant opportunities;
- foster an appreciation of and engagement with current UD initiatives and partnerships at the site, as well as on- campus expertise;
- align more closely on-campus curricula with education abroad opportunities and support the development of signature education abroad sites; and
- accelerate the revision of the existing curriculum, both at the course and the program levels, to incorporate academically meaningful global and intercultural perspectives.

Faculty proposals are reviewed by the Global Education Seminar Planning Team, and from that process the cohort is formed. Faculty engagement includes participation in 10 three-hour seminar sessions occurring across the academic year, plus additional planning sessions immediately prior to the trip. The sessions are designed to address the three elements of the

program, the faculty project, the seminar, and the trip. The GES in 2012 – 2013 was in the third year and traveling to South America for the first time; China was the focus for cohorts 1 and 2.

The agenda for the initial seminar session on August 30 included an overview of the program as depicted by the Venn diagram and objectives of the program and the summary of the participants' project descriptions. The project descriptions would change over the course of the year, but I was struck by a common thread that was evident in the summary of project descriptions, a focus on issues that could be characterized as related to social justice. Members of the group were interested in a wide variety of topics; these included, among others, the influence of indigenous cultures; street art as public expression; how race and diversity are experienced in society; the effects of glacier melting across many dimensions, including economic and health; and the literacy development of marginalized or non-dominant groups. This list represents only a slice of what emerged in the conversations that began on August 30, 2012 in the Learning Teaching Center, and continued on Thursday afternoons for a period of 8 months. On May 13, those conversations shifted to streets, restaurants, airports, and gathering places of all kinds, as we made our way through Buenos Aires, Lima, Machu Picchu and points in between.

With the background of the Global Education Seminar as context, I now share selected experiences that I find myself returning to again and again, either in my own mind as I recall the events of the trip or in stories that I tell to others. My comments in this essay represent my experiences during the trip to South America as facilitator of the Global Education Seminar Cohort 3, and how those experiences were shaped by the other two elements of the program, the seminar and the faculty projects. My comments in this essay are also shaped by my professional life, which has involved P – 12 schools and teacher education. My faculty appointment at the University of Dayton is in the Department of Teacher Education, and my years at the University

of Dayton, a Marianist Institution, have shaped my commitment to education as an avenue to promote social justice. The Marianists, vowed and lay, have a global presence and are known for their commitment to education, service, and social justice. I was particularly interested in what ways social justice was evident in the schools we visited. In this essay I will describe the conversations, visual images, and my impressions from the visits to 5 schools and some final thoughts about what this experience has meant to me.

Impressions of Five Schools: Education and Social Justice

One of the objectives of the Global Education Seminar is to strengthen the University's current network of international resources and relationships. Therefore, connecting with Marianist schools in Buenos Aires and Lima was a prominent activity on our itinerary. On May 14 we arrived in Buenos Aires and were met at the airport by Jose Luis Perez, or Perico as he is known by all. Perico has had a long standing relationship with the University of Dayton and has been a liaison and support person with the Center for International Programs at UD, specifically for Education Abroad. Perico is a lay Marianist, a graduate of one of the schools we were scheduled to visit, and teaches English to students at several schools in Buenos Aires; we visited one of those schools on our first day in country.

Virgen de Caacupe, May 14

No sooner had we dropped our bags at our aparthotel, we were back in the van and off on a tour of BA, culminating in a visit to Virgen de Caacupe, a church and school located in Villa 21, one of the poorest areas of Buenos Aires. Caacupe has received international attention since Cardinal Jose Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires was elected pope. Pope Francis has been called the "slum pope" in articles describing his work in the villas of Buenos Aires and he has had a

special relationship with Caacupe, a source of much pride in those affiliated with the school, including Perico.

In the few hours we spent at Caacupe, I was struck by the energy that was palpable in this place. The students, many of whom are immigrants from Paraguay, were eager to share how this place is a cornerstone in their lives. We sat in the church and heard from the head of the school about their mission to educate so that the next generation has a chance to move out of poverty. We saw the FM radio station, a small studio on the 2nd floor, which is a way for families in the neighborhood to feel connected. Just a few steps away, we entered Perico's classroom and were introduced to about 20 students who were studying English. Perico divided the faculty and students into two groups, and we spent an hour or so chatting with the students. The students wanted to know about our favorite music, what we liked about Argentina, and our favorite foods. The students also told us about how education and learning English was a way for them to have a better life. They told us about how this school and this church was a place for them to feel safe and to belong. Yes, there are drugs in the neighborhood, and yes, people are poor, and yes, they live in a slum. But, they are in school because they see education as essential to future out of poverty. We were at Caacupe but a short time, and we all agreed that we wished we could have spent more time with the students. They opened up to us in ways that only teenagers can, and the conversations were marked with laughter as well as more serious moments. And so it was with our first day, our first visit to a school.

Colegio de Marianista, Buenos Aires, May 16

Fast-forward to Thursday, May 16. Our group was scheduled for two Marianist school visits that day, Colegio Marianista at 8:00 am and Fatima School at 6:00 pm. It is worth noting that during the afternoon we made our way to the Plaza de Mayo to observe the Mothers' March

followed by a visit to the Church of Santa Cruz. Both the Mothers' March and the story of Santa Cruz are stark reminders of the atrocities that occurred during the dark period in Argentine history known as the *Dirty War*.

After an early morning walk from our aparthotel down Callao to the Subte, and from the subway stop to Avenida Rivadavia, we found ourselves entering the impressive campus of Colegio Marianista, a school serving 1750 kindergarten, primary, and secondary students. Our visit began with a meeting with the head of the school, Marcos Romero, during which he provided an overview of the school which has just celebrated its 75th anniversary. A common theme during Romero's comments was that Colegio Marianista is intent on preparing graduates that will be well equipped to meet the needs of the future. The majority of the students who attend this school are privileged, and many of them will hold, what he termed, would be "positions of influence," and as such will "need to have a sense of the common good."

Romero went on to describe the specific strategies that were embedded in the curriculum. First, the school organizes student assemblies where the students discuss the needs in the school and in the community and come to agreement on the action they will take. Second, the students engage in service learning projects in which they go into the community to perform service. Examples include construction work or service as a hospital close to Fatima, a Marianist school in a poor neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Romero was also candid about the challenges that come with a changing world. When Julius Amin, a member of our group who is interested in the issues of race and culture, asked about how the curriculum addresses the experiences of different groups, Romero was candid in his response. He acknowledged that prejudice is more likely to be directed against persons from neighboring countries, and that there is much yet to do on that front.

Following our conversation with Marcos Romero, Juliana Belloqui, Coordinator of the English Language Department, accompanied us on a tour of the school. We stopped in to say hello in some of the classrooms in the primary and elementary grades, and the energy of young children is always a breath of fresh air. After the tour, we met with secondary students and had the opportunity to hear in their words what it means to be a student at Colegio Marianista. I was struck by how serious, and at the same time, how engaging, these students were. They were very aware of their privileged socio-economic status, and they voiced in unequivocal terms their responsibility to society. Our time with the students ended too soon, and as they went off to their next class, I couldn't help but thinking that these students had a clear sense of purpose that aligned with vision articulated by the head of school. To be sure, the group represented top students in the school, but that did not diminish the feeling that I learned a little more about commitment and responsibility from them.

Fatima, Buenos Aires, May 16

Six hours later we were on the Subte again to rendezvous with Perico for our visit to Fatima. Fatima is a school run by the Marianists located in a poor neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Perico has taught English at this school for several years, but was not teaching there this school year. We arrived at the gates of the school just as the sun was setting, and teens and adults were filtering in through for night school. By day, the school is an elementary school, but at night it is a school that serves those who are seeking to finish secondary school as well as the equivalent of post-secondary vocational school. After a brief overview of the school, we began our tour accompanied by a veteran teacher of Fatima.

Over the course of the next 90 minutes or so, we stopped by wood and metal working shops, where students were working on machines that will give them skills that will lead to

employment. Projects that had been completed by previous classes were on tables and displayed on walls. We also entered a chemistry class and my eyes were immediately drawn to the periodic chart. Standing underneath the chart was an enthusiastic professor, encouraging his students to value the importance of chocolate for its nutritional value. As we filed out of the classroom, Perico commented to us that the teachers try to make classes such as history and chemistry relevant to their lives of students, and the chemistry class was an example of that. Connecting the concepts of chemistry with nutrition brings the day-to-day challenges of life into the classroom. We stopped into one risk management class where we learned that the adult students were proud to announce that they are in their last class and will soon graduate, with the hope of securing a better job. We found ourselves in an English as a Foreign Language class, and students were eager to ask adults from the US questions about our favorite music and what we had done in Buenos Aires so far. As night fell and the autumn chill filled the air, we walked along the perimeter of the courtyard, stopping into various classes. The sense of pride among the students and the teachers was palpable, and even though our tour of Fatima only gave us a fragment of the whole story, it was enough to recognize the importance of this school to the neighborhood it serves. As we were escorted to the track where we would board the tram which connected with the subway line, I was aware that we were walking in an area of Buenos Aires that others might not choose to go. Fatima is an anchor in this neighborhood, and when students pass through those gates for night school, they are entering an oasis of hope.

Colegio Santa Maria Marianistas, Lima, May 28

It is May 28, and we have traveled many miles since our visits to schools in Buenos Aires. We arrived in Lima after an inspiring journey into the history of the Incan civilization in Cuzco and Machu Picchu, but we now found ourselves in the bustling metropolis of Lima. As in Buenos

Aires, the Marianists are fully engaged with schools, and we began with Colegio Santa Maria Marianistas. We were scheduled for a full day at Colegio Santa Maria, which included a tour of the extensive and quite extraordinary campus, meetings with teachers and students, and forum on bullying at the end of the day. There were several members of the school administration and the Marianist Regional Education Office who spent the day with us. There is much to tell about our visit to Santa Maria, and I have selected a few snippets to share.

Santa Maria is a school for boys and young men grades 5 – 12 located in an affluent area of Buenos Aires, Sucro. The students by and large come from affluent backgrounds, and as we experienced in Colegio de Marianista in Buenos Aires, the students are engaged in service learning as early as grades 5 and 6. Students are asked to consider “How can we solve problems in the community?” In this process, they are clarifying what it is to be Catholic and to serve the community. Service learning is a method to bridge those two. One of the members of our group with an interest in indigenous populations commented on the role that urban gardens are playing in urban centers, and a member of Santa Maria replied that students have been involved in service trips to two missions where the work was primarily with persons who have indigenous heritage. This exchange launched a series of several questions from the UD group, from which I have drawn some excerpts.

How do the people at Santa Maria help students understand the power of difference? It is important to make connections with the curriculum. The students may start off with the attitude that they are superior, but the focus is on the dignity of all persons. Service learning, such as at the missions, works to build relationships. *Are all parents supportive of service learning?* Fridays are community service day, and students make presentations on how they have served and what they have learned. It is not a matter of forcing the students, we convince them. Students

are accompanied by teachers and volunteer mothers. *Do persons from other communities come into Santa Maria to make connections?* Yes, Santa Maria brought a soup kitchen into Santa Maria. It was a place to start.

A meeting with teachers reinforced many of the themes that were raised in the meeting with the administration. As one teacher commented, students of Santa Maria live in a social bubble, but when they graduate they feel they have a chance to be an agent of change. When we met with the leaders of the student organization, the theme of social responsibility was again a recurring theme. Phrases such as “we are like a family”, and “we work on problems to find a solution” were indicative of what the students had to say. And as we found in all of our visits to the schools, the students were clear in articulating their role as future leaders in making the world a better place, and that starts in their school.

We ended our day at Santa Maria by participating in a forum on bullying that was attended by teachers from the Marianist Schools in Lima. Two members of our group presented, and they were joined by school psychologists from 3 schools. The format was a presentation format, and as such, did not offer the opportunity for dialogue, but the topic is relevant in any school today and our group had much to talk about that evening.

Colegio San Antonio Marianistas, May 30

Our final day in South America was spent in the municipality of Callao, the area of Lima that borders the harbor. It is a diverse area, and encompasses some of the poorest neighborhoods in the Lima metro region. We had a full agenda that day that included a visit to Colegio San Antonio Marianistas, the community house for a discussion on the Marianist social projects in Peru and the need for volunteers, and visits to some of the social projects.

Colegio San Antonio Marianistas is a school enrolling 1600 preschool, primary and secondary students. The school has been operating for 70 years, and the principal and directors of the school are alumni of the school. The students are from lower middle class, and parents pay a modest tuition, about ¼ of what is paid at Santa Maria. There is a scholarship fund for those who cannot pay. The main objective of the school is to develop the Marianist charism through communities of faith. Faith is integrated through the entire curriculum, and the curriculum is also aligned with the Peru Ministry of Education and the Marianist Regional Strategic Plan.

After our opening information session, we toured the school grounds. It is a sizable campus, and has some of the only green space in Callao. The campus is enclosed by a wall, again conveying the sense that the school is an oasis and that students are in a safe space when they are at school. As we were touring the campus, there was a scheduled earthquake drill in which all, including adults, had to make their way to a safe circle. I was reminded of spring tornado drills in the Midwest. We stopped into classrooms and computer labs, and we were all struck by how well equipped the school is.

I took special notice of a poster depicting the Characteristics of a Marianist Education that was hanging in the teachers' lounge. These are the very characteristics we introduce to our first year teacher education students at the University of Dayton. The characteristics are:

- Educate for formation in faith
- Educate in family spirit
- Provide an integral quality education
- Educate for service, justice, and peace
- Educate for adaptation and change

Our visit to Colegio San Antonio Marianistas ended with a visit to classes. I chose to visit an English as Foreign Language class, and had the opportunity to interact with students who were at first shy about asking questions in English, but soon overcame that. As in all of our school visits, the time with students was refreshing, and this was no exception.

Thoughts for Consideration

As I have reflected on these visits to these schools, I am struck by the following. First, the students, teachers, and administrators with whom we interacted clearly articulated, either through actions or words, the message that social justice aims are embedded in the very fabric of these schools. It is revealed in different ways, but it is there nonetheless. In Fatima and Caacupe, students were there because they hope for a better life, and the school is one way for them to realize that. In Colegios Santa Maria, Marianistas, and San Antonio, the students are, for the most part, coming from very different circumstances than the students who are at Fatima and Caacupe. However, the message to these students that is woven throughout the fabric of the curriculum is the same, and that message is one of service, justice, peace, and the common good.

A second feature of these schools, and this is true for Latin America, is that English is being taught to all students. The rationale for this is that English is seen as one tool for better employment and therefore improved financial circumstances. Whether or not this *should* be the case is debatable, but the fact remains, it is the reality. As one of my colleagues who works in the world of ELT (English Language Teaching) in Mexico said, teaching English is a social justice project. The time we spent with Perico's students at Caacupe had left a lasting impression on me, and I have a better understanding of the experiences of those students.

As a teacher educator, these experiences will shape how I approach teaching students who are preparing to teach. As Parker Palmer said, we teach who we are. We are influenced by our experiences, and as I continue to think about what this trip meant to me, I am sure I will unravel the meaning for quite some time.