Active Teaching and Learning in Cross-National Perspective

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**Abstract**

Recent developments in globalization, education, and technology suggest exciting possibilities for cross-national active teaching and learning in international studies. This paper reviews scholarship on the potential for systematic and intentional cross-national pedagogical innovations in international studies. Three critical themes are identified and explored: culture and cross-national education, collaboration across contexts, and the need for systematic assessment. Each plays an important role in facilitating effective active teaching and learning cross-nationally. A broader examination of the opportunities and challenges of cross-national education in international studies suggests guidelines for a systematic, collaborative cross-national approach to an emerging active teaching and learning research agenda.

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Active Teaching and Learning in Cross-National Perspective

The scholarship on innovative pedagogical approaches for teaching international studies has expanded significantly in recent decades, becoming more systematic, and offering new exercises with clearly articulated educational goals and procedures (Lantis, Kille and Krain 2010). However, the majority of published works have tended to focus on discrete exercises for classes in particular settings. Efforts to evaluate the utility of active teaching and learning exercises that cut across different national and cultural contexts have been relatively rare, even though classes often analyze similar phenomena. This gap exists despite developments in globalization, education, and technology that have made cross-national active teaching and learning both increasingly relevant and possible.

This review details emerging scholarship on active teaching and learning that addresses the potential for systematic cross-national pedagogical innovations in international studies. We examine apparent reasons behind the growth in a cross-national pedagogical focus, and identify and review three key issue areas related to the cross-national teaching of international studies. First, where cross-national engagement has been explored, there are differing conclusions regarding whether culture represents an impediment or an opportunity for cross-national active teaching and learning. Second, the literature identifies constraints originating in different contexts that may limit cross-national collaboration and exacerbate issues on top of cultural differences, but does not develop cross-national comparisons that might help to promote comprehensive solutions. Third, scholars contend that further assessment is needed in order to more closely examine the value of such cross-national exercises, and prescribe ways to overcome limits on the potential for cumulation of knowledge. Finally, we situate the discussion of challenges within a broader agenda for exploration of new, exciting opportunities for cross-
national active teaching and learning.

The Emergence of Cross-National Teaching and Learning

Scholarly interest in the potential for cross-national pedagogy in international studies has expanded in the last decade for a number of important reasons. Emerging realities of *globalization* suggest that more institutions and instructors are embracing global engagement in their classrooms. With global awareness comes recognition that there are many new issues on the global agenda, and different ways of thinking about those issues. Globalization demands the embrace of diverse topics, dynamics, and perspectives (Budde-Sung 2011).

Globalization necessitates that higher education help to prepare students for *global citizenship*. This involves delivering content knowledge to students about global politics, but also promotes problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creative decision-making, in addition to cultural empathy, civic engagement, political efficacy, respect for diversity, and conflict resolution (Braskamp 2008). Global citizenship demands careful training and preparation of students for a life of active engagement in an increasingly diverse, interconnected world.

Cross-national perspectives are critical in today’s globalized *higher education market*. English-speaking countries and universities are drawing more students from countries in Asia and the Middle East. Top host countries of foreign students include the United Kingdom (UK), France, Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada, the United States (US) and Russia. Australia’s university student population is nearly 20% international; the UK’s is about 15% (Budde-Sung 2011; Heffernan et al. 2010). Teacher-scholars are also engaging in faculty exchanges with greater frequency, and are increasingly willing to seek job opportunities abroad because of saturated job markets, proximity to loci of research interests, or general intellectual stimulation.
The scholarship of teaching and learning has only begun to wrestle with the benefits and challenges of the internationalization of higher education.

*States and international organizations* also promote globalization in education. The US Department of Education promotes internationalization of curriculums through its Title VI/Fulbright Hays international education programs and grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). The Bologna Process promoted the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for more transparency and transportability of degree programs across Europe, bringing down borders in higher education and creating a zone of mutual trust through standardization (Voegtle, Knill and Dobbins 2011). Similar processes are underway in Latin America, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region (Huisman et al. 2012). UNESCO and the World Bank have co-sponsored major international educational initiatives (Interagency Commission 1990).

Clearly, cross-national educational opportunities are expanding in the 21st century. This dynamic is especially salient for international studies classrooms, where active cross-national approaches can yield greater cross-cultural understanding of political, economic, and social issues. Next, we review the scholarship on factors that enable or hinder effective cross-national pedagogy in order identify how to best engage with this development.

**Critical Issues for Cross-National Education**

Three core themes emerge from the existing literature related to cross-national active teaching and learning. First, many works focus on the role of culture in promoting or challenging cross-national collaborations. Scholars reach surprisingly different conclusions on the question of whether culture represents an impediment or an opportunity for cross-national learning. Second,
the literature describes potential constraints on collaboration embedded in different contexts—including institutional and organizational cultures, as well as the very understanding of the nature of collaboration itself—that may limit cross-national synergy and impact teaching and learning. Third, there is a lack of attention to systematic assessment of cross-national exercises, limiting the potential for cumulation of knowledge in the discipline. What follows is a review of challenges and opportunities identified by these areas of scholarship.

Culture and Cross-National Education

Although there is growing attention to cross-national learning, the related literature remains divided over whether culture impedes or enhances cross-national education. Culture is understood as a pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that is rooted in common values and conventions of particular societies (Schudson 1994). It can have profound effects on the production and consumption of knowledge, and may provide either impediments to or opportunities for exploration of difference and the promotion of critical thinking.

Culture as an Impediment to Learning

Teacher-scholars have debated the role of culture in international politics and pedagogy for some time. In Hofstede’s classic work on “cultural distance,” he contends that certain values distinguish countries from each other. By studying ways that national societies cope with inequality, uncertainty, gender, and relationships, Hofstede establishes dimensions of national culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. His work reveals significant cultural gaps along a spectrum of psychic distance (Hofstede 1984).
Today, teacher-scholars cite evidence of these cultural gaps in their efforts to establish broader networks for cross-national education. Studies identify substantial cultural differences between Australia and China, for example, arguing that typical students from these countries exhibit substantial differences in learning styles (Ramburuth and McCormick 2001). Cultural challenges can impact learning in the classroom, student perceptions of the learning experience, instructors’ perceptions of the teaching experience, and assessment (Heffernan et al. 2010).

Holtbrügge and Mohr (2010) find that learning style preferences in Germany, the UK, the US, Russia, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands, Poland, China, and the United Arab Emirates vary with individual cultural values, and that learning cues are often culturally specific. Other scholars have investigated whether learning cultures can be differentiated by societal focus on “ego goals” such as achievement, assertive behavior, and competition versus feminine values and cooperation, reflection, and modesty. This impacts the level of comfort that students have with structured versus unstructured learning environments, and instructor awareness of these challenges can significantly impact the attainment of educational goals (Jaju et al. 2002; Holtbrügge and Mohr 2010). For instance, Crabtree and Sapp (2004) argue that students have very different expectations in the Brazilian educational environment from what professors and students do in the US, resulting in different learning outcomes.

Culture and influence on learning styles may relate to modes of reasoning, which can impact in-class negotiations and role-plays (Morgan 2000). Bond and Park (1991) found that Korean and American students within an interactive learning environment reached very different educational outcomes. Related work suggests important differences between how students approach group projects, embrace discussion in the wider class, or differences in work approaches as a function of origin in either collectivist versus individualist cultures (e.g.
Campbell and Li 2008). Culturally-sensitive adjustments in cross-national education may be critical to pedagogical success (Pimentel 1995).

**Culture as an Opportunity for Learning**

Conversely, others maintain that culture can be leveraged to enhance the learning environment in international studies classrooms. Kille, Krain, and Lantis (2008) found that during teacher-training workshops in Brazil, international relations instructors and students were highly receptive to a range of innovative approaches in the discipline, and discussions of how the approaches would work best within new cultural contexts proved enriching. Similarly, Storrs (2009) found that teaching western Sociology models in Japan opened a fascinating two-way street of exchange, in contrast to the stereotype of Japanese students as passive learners.

Consistent with this approach, a subset of the scholarship of teaching and learning literature focuses on intentionality in crossing cultures. Preparing students to be effective global citizens means careful examination of subjects of tolerance and cross-cultural sensitivity (Pleschová and Simon 2009). Many international studies instructors seek to infuse diverse viewpoints and multiple cultural experiences in educational settings, and pedagogical goals should be framed in such a way as to tap into those differences (Brooks 2005).

Studies of culture suggest there are inherent differences that have the effect of shifting ways that different negotiators view a common problem, and some have explored how these factors may also carry over the classroom (Cohen 1991; Joy and Kolb 2009). Romanelli, Bird, and Ryan (2009:3) argue:

> culture influences environmental perceptions which, in turn, to some degree determine the way in which information is processed and organized... Culture also
plays a role in conditioning and reinforcing learning styles and partially explains why teaching methods used in certain parts of the world may be ineffective or less effective when blindly transplanted to another locale.

Experts recommend trying to identify and embrace these differences by creating architectures for positive, culturally sensitive learning environments.

Simulations can be expressly designed to promote cross-cultural understandings (Baylouny 2009). Model international organizations can deepen understandings of institutions and processes (Van Dyke 2010). Involvement brings new perspectives and awareness regarding international issues and challenges, and different country means and considerations for addressing such problem areas (e.g. Dunn 2002). Initial research has been able to trace differing impacts on students from varied country backgrounds, such as Americans versus Europeans engaged in a simulated EU (Jones 2008), examine whether students who engage in simulations of conflicts that are geographically or geopolitically proximate to their own countries experience gains in learning and perspective taking (Çuhadar and Kampf 2013), and question whether gender biases impact the provision of multiple perspectives in Model UN negotiations (Coughlin 2013).

Studies of negotiation games have grappled with similar issues of incorporating culture. Some maintain that because of the universality of concepts involved, active learning focused on negotiation and diplomacy can help overcome cultural boundaries (Cobb 2000). Others argue that active teaching and learning can help identify, and perhaps even overcome, traditional group notions of rules and norms and notions of what is right and wrong, true and false, and valuable and worthless in order to address the value of cross-cultural negotiations and conflict resolution (Cohen 1991; Fowler 2009).
Fowler (2005) argues that simulations and role-play may be especially appropriate for teaching international studies in an era of globalization because they encourage engagement, interaction, and application of knowledge in analysis. Through analyzing his cross-cultural teaching experiences throughout South Asia, he concludes that active learning is essential to promote cross-cultural understanding. Yet critics warn that simulation designs can oversimplify cultural complexities and, particularly if they lack careful grounding, may elicit cultural stereotypes (Alexander and LeBaron 2009; Kersten, Koszegi and Vetschera 2003). As Haack points out, “active learning activities do not guarantee deep learning any more than lectures… if the scaffold of learning in which they are embedded in weak” (2008:396).

One way to learn about different cultural and national contexts is to physically immerse oneself in a less culturally proximate community and engage directly with its members and their local issues. Service-learning, or experiential learning designed to provide a needed service to the community while allowing students to learn and apply course concepts in the real world, allows for interesting cross-national implications (Cabrera and Anastasi 2008). Indeed, Annette (2002:87) notes, “[w]hat is particularly striking about service learning is how it is developing internationally.”

Finally, studies suggest that popular cultural works may offer a common ‘language’ for many citizens of the world, and can reach students in new ways and help overcome parochial tendencies of institutional and/or national contexts (Glover 2013). Popular culture represents “an important site where power, ideology, and identity are constituted, produced and/or materialized” (Grayson, Davies and Philpott 2009:155-156). One can use pop culture to show the commonality of global “representations of races, genders, cultures, and issues” (Dixit 2012:290). Alternatively, using pop culture and texts from the Global South can go along way toward
highlighting these issues and challenging Northern students’ preconceived notions (Kuchinsky 2013). Teaching politics through popular culture can be complex, as popular culture takes on different values and roles in the classroom depending on the approach intended (Stump 2013). Yet recent studies show that popular culture can be used effectively across different national and cultural contexts to deepen student understanding of cases, processes, and global phenomena (Inoue and Krain forthcoming).

Technology and Cultural Distance

A related question is whether technology can help overcome cultural impediments to learning through collaborative, cross-national education. Major advances in computing and information and communications technologies have changed the landscape of global education. Some envision a technology-empowered global commons as a space truly open to all citizens, regardless of status or country of origin, to debate and discuss social issues (Darling and Foster 2012). Cogburn and Levinson argue that the “ability to engage in complicated problem solving—knowledge work—in a geographically distributed manner is a significant feature of this new era of international affairs” (2003:35, italics in original).

Some teacher-scholars have been able to put these ideas into practice, creating active learning experiences in a virtual global classroom. Cross-national computer-based simulations can be used both to teach conflict resolution and to bolster intercultural communication, even in an online course setting (Asal et al. 2005; Parmentier 2012; 2013). Cogburn and Levinson (2003) developed a cross-national virtual learning space, linking graduate seminars in South Africa and the US. They found that global virtual teams, connected by technology, helped to enhance the learning environment and achieve educational objectives.
Other innovative approaches include a web-based dialog initiative between Americans and various Middle Eastern countries that boasts implementation in more than 100 universities and two-dozen countries (Soliya 2013). Online Model United Nations (O-MUN) brings together participants “across different cultures and vast geographic distances, in real time, for the process of gaining knowledge and laying the foundation for openness and understanding between people” in a virtual environment (O-MUN 2013). Such efforts illustrate the potential power of technology to connect representatives of different cultures and to create foundations for greater understanding and cooperation.

Unfortunately, technology cannot completely surmount the challenges presented by students with fundamentally different language skills or competencies. In many of the applications discussed above, the default language of student interaction with instructors and each other is English. This can put non-native English speakers at a disadvantage in communicating their ideas or processing those of others, and may discourage students from engaging due to anxiety or frustration. As such, technology can often go only so far in overcoming cultural barriers.

**Collaboration Across Contexts**

Cross-national teaching and learning may also be affected by constraints imposed by cultural differences across institutions, disciplines, governments, and even technological limits. The very meaning of the term ‘collaboration’ may be culturally bound. Cultural frames may create different expectations regarding shared workloads, degree of shared input, timelines, and the question of structure of active teaching and learning exercises. However, these collaborations
have terrific potential for enrichment of classroom education and institutional settings, as well as the profession (Mackenzie and Meyers 2012).

Institutional and departmental contexts may also impact the potential for cross-national collaboration, the success of active teaching and learning approaches, and the generalizability of assessment results. *Institutional differences* are reflected in varying priorities on teaching versus research, with implications for allocation of institutional resources. When individual faculty recognition, including promotion and funding, hinge almost exclusively on research outcomes, there is great pressure on those seeking to use innovative teaching techniques without the likelihood of institutional reward. Further institutional differences include the extent to which they offer general educational programs, how they produce research, how they enroll and teach undergraduate students, how they enroll and teach postgraduate students, and whether they are public or private institutions (Boughey 2011; Willis 2009).

Institutional differences are also dynamic in nature. Recent growth in private universities in countries such as Brazil, Poland, and Turkey have led to a competitive atmosphere that has at times encouraged a greater focus on teaching quality in order to better service students who now have greater educational choice (Inoue 2012; Marzeda-Mlynarska 2012; Çuhadar 2012). Spreading standardization of education via the Bologna Process has clearly impacted universities in the EU, as well as neighboring areas such as Russia (Voegtle, Knill and Dobbins 2011; Lebedeva 2012). Changing national standards and assessment in countries such as Australia and the UK may impact teaching practices (Rofe 2012; Scott 2012), and in the US the national dialogue on the purpose and best approach to higher education provides new external pressures (Krain, Kille, and Lantis 2012).
Even though most institutions of higher education claim to value scholarship on teaching and learning, this area of work is especially vulnerable in times of financial trouble. As Elton (2008:1) argues, the privileging of disciplinary research “is strengthened everywhere by features of marketization which have increased the importance of management and finance in academia, to the detriment of the really important work of academics with which [the scholarship of teaching and learning] is concerned—teaching and research.” While this describes particular concerns about these constraints in the context of higher learning in the UK, such a dynamic has potential to influence funding across many different national contexts (Bernstein 2012).

Academic departments, tenure review committees, and faculty senates sometimes have different organizational cultures, different orientations regarding the potential value of scholarship on teaching and learning (Lee 2007). Some suggest that such work is less significant than traditional publications in high-ranking academic journals. Teacher-scholars must be mindful of prevailing pressures or norms within departments and institutions (Hockings 2005).

A related dimension is student culture. In some contexts students perceive innovative teaching techniques in a negative light—reacting nervously to new approaches that press for greater critical and analytical thinking, or perceiving them as signs of faculty laziness in not providing information via the traditional lecture format (Çuhadar 2012; Inoue 2012). Different levels of student motivation, across and within institutions, may also inhibit effective use of active teaching and learning approaches cross-nationally.

Finally, a critical resource area that can affect cross-national education in international studies is technology. There are numerous applications of technology to the international studies classroom (e.g. Hewitt 2001). However, some students, classrooms, and institutions have limited access to reliable technologies, potentially impacting their learning environments (Olson and
Olson 2000; Inoue 2012). Yet, recent innovations demonstrate the great potential for accessible technology that can reach a wide range of institutions around the world (Cogburn, Seng, and Nelson 2012).

The Need for Systematic Assessment

Although the scholarship on assessment of active teaching and learning has grown over time, discussions of assessment of cross-national education in international studies remain limited. The goal of systematic assessment of the effectiveness of active teaching and learning efforts in the classroom should ideally be driven by instructors’ desires to see whether they and their students have met their educational objectives, but tends to also reflect wider trends and imperatives in higher education to provide greater accountability and quality assurance in undergraduate education (Voegtle, Knill and Dobbins 2011).

To date, assessment of teaching in international studies tends to be approached in limited and idiosyncratic ways. Most often, the emphasis on assessment comes from external pressures. This includes regional governmental pressures, such as the entry into the EU and the guiding strictures of the Bologna Process (Marzeda-Mlynarska 2012; Lebedeva 2012). Country-level assessment directives sometimes drive assessment, including formal processes carried out in Australia, Turkey, and the UK (Scott 2012; Çuhadar 2012; Rofe 2012). In the US the debate rages over linking assessment outcomes to funding (Krain, Kille and Lantis 2012; Pettenger 2012). Particular institutions have also launched detailed assessment plans, but these tend to operate at the aggregate level and are not necessarily impacting individual classroom practice (Marzeda-Mlynarska 2012; Scott 2012). In most countries, external assessment also tends to be more focused on research process and outcomes than on teaching instruction and ability,
although classroom evaluation is often a key part of US professor review. An Australian university provides the interesting example of a “teaching and learning track” to promotion, which includes careful scholarship in the area, but this is “very much a minority route” compared to the professors on a research track (Scott 2012:5).

There has been progress in assessment of the overall class experience for students in many institutions, but frequently not of classroom exercises themselves. As noted by Marzeda-Mlynarska (2012:2), in anonymous class evaluations completed by students in Poland “among the evaluation criteria only one was about methods of teaching,” although there have been developments to more systematically assess the classroom experience. Faculty from a range of countries stress that the emphasis on (non-pedagogical) research evaluation for faculty review means that instructors most often are not motivated to move beyond traditional teaching methods and assessment (Çuhadar 2012, Marzeda-Mlynarska 2012, Lebedeva 2012, Rofe 2012). Where there is an awareness of, and accepted use of, active learning techniques, these are often not applied or assessed in a systematic way (Inoue 2012).

There are multiple approaches to measuring educational outcomes. *Direct* measures assess what students have learned, while *indirect* measures help us to assess students’ perceptions of what they have learned (Angelo 1998). Most of the important, pioneering work on active teaching and learning in cross-national context that has assessed the effectiveness of exercises has relied on indirect assessment measures. For example, Cogburn and Levinson (2003) assess their distributed learning environment’s *Global Syndicate* by administering an extensive evaluation survey to get at student approaches to and perspectives on their experiences. Mendeloff and Shaw (2009) examine student post-simulation comments to divine the possible effects of different national or cultural context on the outcomes of the simulation, while Shaw
(2012) compares the outcomes and bargaining behaviors for role play exercises transported from the U.S. educational setting to Poland and also assesses the overall effectiveness of the exercises in meeting educational objectives by reviewing student reflection papers, oral debriefing, or brief student surveys. Jones (2008) analyzes changes in student experiences in a cross-continent EU simulation with survey questions on student perceptions.

Some recent efforts at examining active teaching and learning cross-nationally have more broadly applied assessment, attempting to measure both student knowledge gains (direct) and student perceptions or attitudes (indirect) using experimental pre- and post-test designs. Pettenger and Young (2012) evaluate the effects of a simulation of a post-Kyoto Climate Change negotiation on US and Canadian students’ attitudes and knowledge about climate change, international negotiation, and cultural values. In a cross-national experimental study conducted among American, Turkish, Israeli, and Palestinian students using a video game called “Peacemaker”, Çuhadar and Kampf (2011) assess student learning about, and changing perceptions of, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Inoue and Krain (forthcoming) test whether students in two different Theories of International Relations classrooms—one in Brazil and one in the US—demonstrated differences in knowledge acquisition, understanding, or ability to apply theoretical frameworks to real world cases. They assessed the effects of the film Thirteen Days on student perceived and actual understanding of theories of foreign policy decision-making and their application to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In each case faculty in cooperating institutions were able to assess progress on educational objectives that, absent cross-national collaboration, would not have been achieved.

These latter studies suggest that a deep, systematic understanding of a range of educational outcomes is both doable and advantageous. Properly implemented indirect measures
advance our understanding of how active teaching and learning exercises affect student-reported changes in perceptions or attitudes, or perceptions of their own learning. Direct measures help us see knowledge gains or other outcomes unfiltered, by eschewing student reporting for more direct observation. When paired, a picture emerges of how exercises affect how students think, as well as what they actually learn. And when deployed in cross-national context, assessment can help us see the effects (or lack of effects) of national, cultural, or institutional context with greater clarity.

**Cross-National Active Learning Research Agenda**

The emerging scholarship on cross-national active teaching and learning is an important outgrowth of an already vibrant literature on active teaching and learning. As noted above, important questions about the generalizability of pedagogical techniques across borders and cultures, the ability of educators to create more globally connected educational environments, and the degree to which students in one context can truly engage with people, issues, and ideas of a different context have surfaced in this early work, but teacher-scholars also have begun to address these challenges in fascinating ways. This evolutionary process comes at a critical moment for higher education, as developments in globalization, education, and technology have made active teaching and learning practices increasingly relevant and have emphasized thinking and teaching cross-nationally.

Those same developments provide an important opportunity to engage in a multinational effort to evaluate pedagogical techniques cross-nationally. Globalization allows for more common ground (both in terms of issues and materials) across classrooms in very different contexts. The increasing awareness of the need to globally engage in collaborative inquiry makes
this moment ripe for cross-national analysis of pedagogy. Technology now allows classes on
different continents to run the same exercises at the same time (in separate classrooms, or in one
virtual space), and debrief together in real time. Never has it been easier for faculty in one
country to collaborate with faculty in another on designing and implementing active teaching and
learning approaches, without ever leaving their respective offices or classrooms.

However, this review also shows that questions critical to the future of multi-national
efforts at pedagogical collaboration remain unaddressed. Are national and cultural differences
insurmountable barriers, ones that can be overcome, or are they actually opportunities for deeper
learning and understanding? If active teaching and learning approaches work in varied settings,
do they work in distinct manners, or have differential effects? Does culture play a role in how
students approach, process, or retain knowledge gained from the use of an active learning
approach? Does it affect how they interface with or benefit from technology in the classroom?
Does it affect their levels of engagement with the material differently? How does more direct
interaction with students in other parts of the world affect educational outcomes of interest? And
How do we ensure truly collaborative cross-national pedagogy rather than collaborations that are
foster a sense of cultural imperialism? Regardless of the answers to these questions, it is clear
that cultural context must be considered and engaged as an issue when designing, implementing,
and assessing active teaching and learning cross-nationally.

Exploring these questions focuses the suggested research agenda needed for extending
our understanding of cross-national educational efforts. This agenda is likely best addressed via
simultaneous evaluation of exercises or approaches under similar circumstances, but in different
national or cultural contexts. This quasi-experimental approach allows us to move beyond
questions of “how does this technique translate across borders?” to “how is this technique’s
pedagogical success affected by the context within which it is employed?” Yet, to date, there have been few rigorous studies done in multiple classrooms in different countries that employ such an approach. This is an area ripe for future work, and a direction that seems vital to the development of the emerging study of active teaching and learning cross-nationally.

Successful cross-national active teaching and learning in international studies can only occur if hurdles to collaboration across contexts can be overcome. Perhaps the biggest challenges involve institutional context. Scholarship needs to identify different definitions of collaboration, coordination and access issues, and professional or institutional constraints. The development of a rigorous scholarship of cross-national active teaching and learning itself will make it easier for faculty interested in employing these techniques to point to evidence of their utility, helping them to surmount such obstacles.

Finally, careful and conscious reflection on teaching approaches is important for knowledge generation and refinement in this burgeoning area of research. Attention to design is equally critical in creating a successful active learning exercise and in assessing its effects on knowledge acquisition, depth of understanding, and retention. Specific to assessment, it is vital to incorporate both direct and indirect measures to allow for full examination of the range of learning outcomes. A rigorous quasi-experimental pre- and post-test design is optimal, giving teacher-scholars the ability to compare the effects of active learning exercises both within each classroom and cross-nationally, and to allow for some degree of control over the materials used and the context within which the exercises are introduced.

These suggested approaches would certainly follow “best practices” in the literature, though perhaps not “standard practices.” Many studies of active teaching and learning employ quasi-experimental designs, though there have been few attempts to just as carefully examine its
effects in a rigorous cross-national design. Many studies assess exercise or approaches, but few studies also employ both direct and indirect assessment of educational outcomes. There is much room for growth and rigor in this area.

All elements of this suggested research agenda are interdependent. The goal of assessment is (or should be) to make sure that exercises are designed to best meet the learning needs of the students and the learning objectives of the faculty member, and to make adjustments to exercises in order to improve this connection. However, there are often no external benefits – and indeed in many cases there are disincentives – to undertaking such careful assessment of teaching approaches. At the same time, carrying out careful assessment is vital to demonstrating the legitimacy of active teaching approaches to external audiences, reinforcing the earlier point that rigorous study of cross-national active teaching and learning can help to overcome institutional impediments to its use. By doing so, teacher-scholars can also add to the emerging scholarship on the educational effects of active teaching and learning in across multiple contexts.

**Conclusion**

Given the relevance of active teaching and learning techniques in today’s global higher education system, there is a clear need for scholarly engagement and studies that critically assess these practices. We have identified themes, challenges, and an agenda for further research. Each of the three critical themes we explored – culture and cross-national education, collaboration across contexts, and the need for systematic assessment – plays an important role in facilitating or impeding effective active teaching in learning cross-nationally. Together they shape an emerging research agenda that is multi-national in scope and cross-national in design, rigorous in
both implementation and assessment, and attentive to obstacles to effective implementation of collaborative cross-national active teaching and learning.

There is real value in teacher-scholars’ engagement with, and systematic evaluation of, active teaching and learning in cross-national perspective. Hutchings and Shulman claim that “a scholarship of teaching requires a kind of ‘going meta’ in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning…and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it” (1999: 13). We agree wholeheartedly, and suggest the need for doing so with a more global view of the subfield, the context, and the international studies classroom in mind.
References


