

## The Future of International Exchange Programs

M. BREWSTER SMITH

*SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL*

To evaluate old and new directions we must keep objectives sharply in mind. Of late, articulately explicit discussion of the objectives of international exchange has fortunately been supplanting the vaguer statements of pious hope that sprang from the unanalyzed convictions that exchange is inherently a Good Thing. A brief review of the principal objectives that have been advanced is made easy by the availability of an excellent summary by the Committee on Educational Interchange Policy.<sup>1</sup> From the generally expressed purposes of sponsoring groups, the Committee lists the following in descending order of frequency:

1. To promote international understanding and good will among the peoples of the world as a contribution to peace.
2. To develop friends and supporters for the United States by giving persons from other countries a better understanding of the life and culture of the United States.
3. To contribute to the economic, social, or political development of other countries.
4. To aid in the educational or professional development of outstanding individuals.
5. To advance knowledge throughout the world for the general welfare of man.

Goals of individual participants in these programs, the Committee finds, assume a different order:

1. To advance the candidate's personal and professional development.
2. To prepare the candidate for service to his home country through the acquisition of additional knowledge and skills.
3. To promote international understanding.
4. To contribute to the advancement of knowledge through cooperative study and

research with professional colleagues in the United States.

While these are goals and purposes involved in the flow of foreign student visitors to the United States, surely they apply with minimal rephrasing to the complementary flow of American teachers, scholars, and specialists abroad.

Confronting such ambitious and diverse lists, American institutions of higher education need to establish their own sense of direction, to find their own appropriate role. Are they to identify with the governmental perspective, and view international exchange as an arm of national policy? Or should they cleave to their traditional concern with individual fulfillment? I am impressed by the conclusion reached in the same document I have been quoting, that "The primary purpose of any international educational exchange . . . should be, by definition, education"

Consider the goals of educational exchange in the light of the values and methods intrinsic to the educational enterprise. Advancing individual personal and professional development? Contributing to the advancement of knowledge? These goals are obviously central to the nature of education. Promoting international understanding? Again, yes, provided that we avoid the sentimental and egotistic but all too prevalent confusion of understanding with uncritical acceptance. Contributing to the development of other countries, and, one might diffidently add, to that of our own? Surely this is in keeping with the pragmatic educational current that makes application in social practice at least coordinate with individual enrichment as a test of good teaching. Developing friends and supporters for our country and its policies? Here is the rub. Good Americans themselves, educators surely want to make friends individually and as a nation; and the assumption—often realistic, sometimes not—that understanding entails liking and even admiration (when it is

ourselves that are to be understood!) is a natural and essentially harmless one for us to make. But in terms of our perspective as educators on the goals of exchange, we make a serious mistake, it seems to me, if we accept a propagandistic definition of our objectives. Whatever our convictions as citizens, our purpose should be to educate, not to "sell." Clarity on this point keeps faith with the essential premises of American education. And, after all, we may make truer friends for the United States if we regard friendship as a fortunate by-product, not a calculated objective.

My view of the future of international exchange programs, to the extent that it involves American higher education, is dominated by one over-arching fact: the flood of enrollment that, we are assured from many quarters, is due to crowd our campuses almost tomorrow. Where will educational exchange programs fit into this picture?

Yesterday, when the flow of foreign students to the United States and of American teachers and scholars abroad was a mere trickle, exchange was an amenity of the campus scene, not to say an exotic luxury. Even in this day of greatly expanded programs, if the dollar costs have given rise to occasional argument, we have not had to look too closely at the educational costs. There have been, by and large, enough teachers, classrooms, and laboratories; or at least, the pressures on them have not been so great that a few foreign students—some 34,000 of them all told—have seemed to make very much difference. We have been able to assume, without closely examining the matter, that foreign students contribute a valuable cosmopolitan quality to the classroom and to campus life; that teaching, study, or technical service abroad add to the stature and resources of our own educational staff.

Before long, many educational institutions may face a state of affairs in which the admission of a foreign student will entail the exclusion of a worthy American student; in which the staffing of an adequate advisory service for foreign students will subtract from the resources available for student personnel work generally; in which the

teaching load of the faculty member temporarily released for foreign study or service cannot readily be redistributed. Under such circumstances, we may not only expect the conventional goals of exchange programs to be scrutinized more closely and the extent of their achievement to be evaluated more skeptically, but we may also anticipate that institutional interests in educational exchange—vested interests, if you like, but legitimate ones—will be weighed more closely.

What precisely have foreign students contributed, educationally, by their presence on the campus? What have been the effects of exchange experience on the teaching and research of members of American faculties? We have only impressions to go on. We are even more in the dark, it seems to me, when it comes to answering questions still more relevant for practical educational policy: What, for example, is the minimal and what the optimal number of foreign students for institutions of different types and sizes, if the selfish benefits that we anticipate from their presence are to be realized? Similar questions in regard to "saturation effects" have been raised but not resolved concerning the impact of exchange programs on the development of foreign countries. Any pertinent evidence that can be gleaned from research in the coming years should be most valuable, even though questions such as I have posed are probably not formulated so as to permit a direct research attack.

But if we do not have exact answers to questions like these, we can, I think, be sure that the emphasis in programs of educational exchange will fall increasingly on quality rather than quantity; on intensiveness rather than extensiveness; on fuller use of the personal resources already at hand. Postwar exchange programs were new, large, and somewhat chaotic. Even without the prospective stimulus of hard necessity, a period of consolidation, reappraisal, and refinement of approach would be the natural sequel.

On this assumption, I will spend the time left to me on some ideas about ways in which a more intensive and carefully conceived approach to the challenge of education

across cultural boundaries may be expected to bear fruit. Here acquaintance with research provides leads, if not definitive conclusions. I will have mainly in mind the problems encountered with exchange programs involving countries outside Western Europe with its common cultural heritage in which we share.

Consider, first, the problem of who gets exchanged: selection. Most persons acquainted with existing programs would agree, I think, that there is much room for improvement here. Major aspects of selection are beyond the immediate control of the American college; but the maintenance of admission standards remains its prerogative. Often, it seems, American institutions facing the difficult task of evaluating foreign credentials are inclined to be charitable in the standards they apply. The intended kindness may be misguided. As indigenous educational institutions gain strength even in the remote corners of the world, investment in the social expense of a foreign education is increasingly regarded as justified only for the very well qualified and prepared. When first-rate American institutions bend to accept second-rate students they invite needless problems. Rather than evoking gratitude from the students' home countries, moreover, such policies only tend to cheapen American educational standards as they appear in foreign eyes. Rigorous application of sound standards seems desirable in every respect.

If American institutions come increasingly to set limits on the number of foreign students that they can accept, another issue of selection will be raised more pointedly than at present: At what level of educational and social maturity should exchangees be selected? Policy here should obviously depend on priorities among program goals. The results of research suggest, in brief, that while exchange at the younger, less committed age levels may be especially conducive to individual international understanding, goals of national development and professional advancement are better served by-postgraduate exchange, after the student is already established in his professional career.

A different problem comes to the fore in regard to the selection of American educators to take part in exchange with the economically less advanced countries. As a current study by Gordon Macgregor<sup>2</sup> is making clear, members of American faculties who go on Fulbright exchange to these parts of the world must cope with a radically different level and manner of living, and with many specific frustrations in their conditions of work. The "culture-shock" that sometimes ensues can be demoralizing if not immobilizing. A high premium should therefore be set on traits of personal flexibility and resourcefulness as the academic community selects its representatives to take part in this important aspect of exchange.

Many of the Americans who take part in educational exchange do so as teachers; in a more inclusive sense, of course, everyone who goes abroad teaches whether he intends to or not. What attitudes and skills should we seek and inculcate in those who are to teach across cultural boundaries? In the realm of attitudes, it seems to me the most important is freedom from being what anthropologists call "culture-bound." It comes naturally to us, as it does to all peoples, to think of our way as the best way. But American superiority in material wealth and American prominence in the world arena of political, military, and economic power raise strong barriers to sympathetic international understanding that ethnocentric attitudes on the part of representative Americans can only accentuate.

Effective cross-cultural education obviously thrives in an atmosphere of mutuality, which is the key to good communication, and therefore to learning and understanding. As our exchange programs are conceived, the element of mutuality is less prominent than the by-word ex-change would suggest. America teaches; other countries learn. Such, it appears, is the usual tacit assumption. This assumption grates on the national feelings of non-Americans, who often come from countries with long histories and rich cultural traditions, and who, in any case, can hardly avoid observing what is to them the abysmal American ignorance of foreign people, places, and events, and of Old World cultural and spiritual values.

There is plenty, they rightly feel, that they could teach us!

Realities of the world situation and of the American interests reflected in American-sponsored exchange programs make inevitable some emphasis on the role of the United States as exemplar. In this setting, campus interests in the foreign visitor as an educational resource tend to redress the balance and establish the spirit of give-and-take most favorable to productive learning and sympathetic understanding. More attention might be paid to putting these resources to use.

My suggestions so far have remained within the context of conventional exchange programs. Pressures on the American campus may put a premium on less conventional approaches. One such approach, which concerns American educational institutions only negatively, would place greater reliance on training in a "third country." For many students in the Middle East, for example, the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo may be the most efficient channels to the advantages of American training; channels that can be expanded to provide for many more students than any program of transoceanic exchange could envisage. Where the skills to be learned must be applied in settings

altogether different from the United States, moreover, the "third-country" approach to American sponsorship of cross-cultural education has strong intrinsic advantages.

Another "unconventional" sort of program, currently being developed on a broad scale by the International Cooperation Administration (formerly Foreign Operations Administration), invites the direct collaboration of American institutions with their counterparts in other countries. Staff and students are exchanged for the purpose of initiating new kinds of training or strengthening present facilities in the counterpart institutions. While developments under these ICA university contracts are still too recent to assess, the underlying strategy is based on a consideration that is fundamental to the broader objectives of educational exchange: appreciable results in national development, in international understanding, in any respect that transcends the lives of the exchanged individuals, depend on a "multiplier effect." That is, since the number of persons exchanged in any program is inherently a minute proportion of the national populations, a crucial ingredient of a successful program is its potentiality for catalyzing processes that ramify beyond the persons directly included.

---

1 "The Goals of Student Exchange: An Analysis of Goals of Programs for Foreign Students," Committee on Educational Interchange Policy, 1 East 67th Street, New York, N. Y., January 1955.

2 For the Committee on International Exchange of Persons of the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils.