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Mark R. McMinn

George Fox University, mmcminn@georgefox.edu

Vitaliy L. Voytenko

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Investing the Wealth: Intentional Strategies for Psychology Training in Developing Countries

Mark R. McMinn and Vitaliy L. Voytenko
Wheaton College

The knowledge and skills of psychology can be useful in developing countries where indigenous mental health resources are sometimes scarce. Although it may be useful for psychologists to provide short-term training in developing countries, the potential for long-term change is best accomplished by investing in training students from developing countries, especially those committed to returning to their homeland after completing their training. Three “investment strategies” are suggested for training students from developing countries: faculty awareness, intentional mentoring, and facilitated launching. Challenges and implications for professional psychologists are discussed.

Pervasive mental health needs and increasing ideological tensions throughout various countries of the world leave little doubt that psychologists have important knowledge and skills to offer in promoting international relations (Levant, 2002). The scientific bases and professional applications of psychology can be useful in establishing public policy and advocacy efforts on behalf of civil liberties, dispelling myths that lead to hate crimes, developing prevention programs that teach effective problem-solving and reconciliation tactics, assessing needs and perceptions of disparate cultural groups, and helping those in the aftermath of trauma. But the supply of psychologists is sparse in many developing countries of the world—sometimes because of political regimes that have discouraged psychological exploration—resulting in many underserved international populations (see David, Moore, & Domuta, 2002).

In response to the need for psychological training in less developed countries, psychologists and other mental health professionals from the United States have been involved increasingly in international training and service ventures. These endeavors include assessment of mental health needs (Ellens, McMinn, Lake, Hardy, & Hayen, 2000; Levers, 1997; McMinn, Roh, et al., 2001), providing of direct services (Mwiti & Gatewood, 2001; Pedulla & Pedulla, 2001; Weine et al., 2002), and training of local mental health providers and instructors (Bacigalupe, 1998; Bacigalupe &

Fuks, 1998; Inger, 1998; McMinn, Meek, Canning, & Pozzi, 2001; Weine et al., 2002). An example of this can be found in an earlier *Professional Psychology* article in which Pedulla and Pedulla (2001) described an innovative model for cross-cultural service provision. They titled their article “Sharing the Wealth.”

While affirming Pedulla and Pedulla’s (2001) short-term model for delivering services, we believe it is equally important to think of long-term strategies for investing the wealth. Investing in less developed countries requires long-term commitments that ultimately result in increasing the psychological resources available within the country. Ultimately, this is a training task, calling on psychologists in countries with highly developed psychological expertise to invest in training psychologists in countries with less developed psychology resources.

To some extent, this long-term international investment occurs naturally as students come from other countries to study psychology in the United States or other countries with respected graduate programs in psychology. But there are limits to this sort of training: Students from the most needy countries often do not have the awareness or resources to consider studying abroad, international students may not receive mentoring that helps them apply what they are learning to the cultural context of their country, and many students do not return to their homeland after completing their studies. Many doctoral and internship programs provide training for international students, but to what extent are these programs culturally relevant (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, & Misra, 1996) and intentional about investing in international students for the sake of promoting psychological knowledge and services around the world?

Investment Strategies

We suggest three strategies for investing in international students. These involve faculty awareness, intentional mentoring, and facilitated launching.

Faculty Awareness

Most psychologists trained in the United States have not received extensive training in international psychology, which can

MARK R. MCMINN received his PhD in clinical psychology from Vanderbilt University in 1983 and is an American Board of Professional Psychology diplomate in clinical psychology. He is Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech professor of psychology at Wheaton College, where he directs the Center for Church–Psychology Collaboration. His research interests pertain to clergy–psychologist collaboration and the relationship of psychology, theology, and spirituality.

VITALIY L. VOYTENKO is a PsyD candidate in clinical psychology at Wheaton College in Illinois and has research interests in church–psychology collaboration and ethics in psychology. A native of Ukraine, he plans to return to his home country to promote the field of clinical psychology in the Ukrainian academy.

CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE should be addressed to Mark R. McMinn, Department of Psychology, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187. E-mail: mark.mcminn@wheaton.edu

easily lead to international students feeling marginalized or misunderstood. As is true for any diversity issue in professional psychology, a distinct set of challenges emerges when trying to apply psychological theories and principles developed in one cultural context to individuals and groups living in a different context. For many international students, these cultural differences are amplified by language differences. As a result, international students may sometimes experience their classes and clinical training to be only marginally relevant to the work they aspire to do in their homelands. Thus, it is important for faculty who wish to invest in another country's psychological resources to have some initial exposure to the challenges of international psychology (see Dumont & Louw, 2001; Sabourin, 2001). Of course it is not reasonable to travel to each country from which a potential student may come, but a general level of awareness can be developed through reading, membership in international psychology organizations, and travel to one or more countries with less developed psychology resources.

In our situation, one of us (McMinn) is a U.S. psychologist teaching at a doctoral program accredited by the American Psychological Association, and one of us (Voytenko) is a Ukrainian student receiving doctoral training with plans to return to Ukraine upon graduation. The relationship began, in one sense, before we met. I (McMinn) went to teach intensive courses on basic counseling methods at two Ukrainian seminaries. Before making the trip I read and talked with colleagues about Ukrainian culture, conducted a preliminary needs assessment through e-mail contacts in Ukraine (Ellens et al., 2000), and throughout the trip I learned as much as possible about the economic, social, and political context of Ukraine. Having taught through interpreters—which entails various frustrations and limitations—I returned to the United States sensing that the effectiveness of my teaching was impeded by a substantial cultural and language divide (see Draguns, 2001). Though I found the experience rewarding from a professional growth perspective, I began thinking how much more effective it would be to invest myself in the development of a Ukrainian professional who could, in turn, provide similar training workshops without the cultural and language obstacles. When this opportunity for mentoring a Ukrainian student later presented itself, I had some preliminary understanding of the Ukrainian cultural context from which he came. Moreover, attempting to teach psychology in several countries (e.g., Slovakia, Ukraine, Korea) had attuned me to some of the challenges Voytenko might face in a cross-cultural training environment.

Intentional Mentoring

International students often have adjustment challenges related to culture and language that transcend the typical challenges faced by other graduate students. It is ideal for international students to know that someone on the faculty cares about and has some understanding of their homeland, and that this care and understanding is communicated through some sort of mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is an important part of graduate training for all students, and informal mentoring—in which the relationship develops spontaneously rather than being assigned as a faculty duty—is generally preferred by both mentor and protégé (see Johnson, 2002). We make this point because it seems unlikely that a

mandated program of international student mentoring would be successful. Rather, as faculty are encouraged to develop international interests and awareness, the hope is that they will spontaneously develop mentoring relationships with international students.

In our situation, we have fostered a mentoring relationship through three means. First, we have collaborated on an international service project, developing a Web site for Ukrainian pastors. The site gives basic information about depression and other common mental health challenges. The content of the Web site was informed by a needs and resources assessment conducted during an earlier trip to Ukraine (Ellens et al., 2000). The Web development project—available in both English and Russian—provides a service for Ukrainian religious leaders while also providing a vehicle for mentoring and impetus to keep thinking about ways to make the content of a U.S. professional psychology program relevant in a Ukrainian context. This helps keep me (Voytenko) focused on Ukraine and sustains my intention to return there upon completion of doctoral training in the United States.

Second, we have worked on research projects together. These have involved projects specific to Ukraine as well as a more general research program investigating ethics training in U.S. seminaries. These research projects have led to presentations at national meetings and coauthored journal articles. Research mentoring has a long and rich history in psychology (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002) and often leads to publications that benefit both the mentor and protégé.

Third, we meet together for breakfast or lunch every 2 or 3 weeks. This allows for a less formal interaction in which individualized attention can be devoted to professional development issues, personal concerns, cultural adjustment, and so on.

Facilitated Launching

One of the common challenges for students from developing countries is maintaining a vision to return to their homeland upon finishing graduate training in the United States. Many foreign students studying in the United States come to enjoy the freedom, economic prosperity, and career opportunities available in this country. Returning home, for some, requires forgoing some or all of these benefits. Thus, the student's commitment to returning to the country of origin after completing his or her education in the United States is paramount for successful investment in a developing country to occur. Intentional efforts to launch the student in his or her homeland can help in this regard. Just as the wise clinician considers termination well before the final session, launching an international student requires advanced planning.

For those in academic advising roles, it is helpful to encourage international students to develop dissertation interests that pertain to their homelands. In our case, I (Voytenko) am developing an empirically based training curriculum to familiarize religious leaders in Ukraine with relevant mental health issues. We return to the metaphor used throughout this article—investing the wealth—to illustrate the importance of this strategy. The dissertation process is one of the most intensive learning experiences in doctoral training, and it often is influential in establishing the trajectory of graduates' early careers. By encouraging a dissertation pertaining to an international student's homeland, the research supervisor is

investing significant energy in a cause that will ultimately contribute to psychological expertise in another country.

Another possibility, though not feasible in every situation, is to travel together to the student's homeland for purposes of short-term volunteer work, intensive training of the doctoral student, enhancing the credibility of the student, and helping the student establish a network of professional contacts. Here the mentoring psychologist has a unique opportunity to use his or her respected status (e.g., a doctorate in psychology, professorship at a university/college, years of experience) to help "set the stage" for the student's future return to the developing country and his or her recognition by the local professionals.

In summer 2002, we led a 3-day workshop for Ukrainian Christian leaders in Kiev, Ukraine, on the topic of depression. Twenty-four church leaders, Christian mental health professionals, and students attended the workshop. We divided the teaching material between the two of us. When McMinn taught, I (Voytenko) interpreted. I taught my sessions in Russian. During the 3 days of the seminar the attendees learned about depression, its etiology and treatment modalities, and special intervention topics such as suicide prevention and ethics of pastoral counseling. They were also introduced to basic helping skills, such as active listening and restatement, and had an opportunity to practice these skills in triads. The participants' feedback about the workshop was enthusiastically positive. I (Voytenko) began earning trust and respect among Ukrainian religious and mental health professionals, which promises to be instrumental in my future work in Ukraine.

After the student returns to his or her country, the mentoring psychologist may choose (and is encouraged) to maintain the relationship with the student through e-mail. This helps maintain points of connection between doctoral training in one country and early career development in another. Upon my return to Ukraine, I (Voytenko) plan to continue working with religious leaders, encouraging and training them to provide more adequate pastoral counseling to their parishioners. I also plan to teach undergraduate- and graduate-level psychology and practice psychotherapy in a public or private agency.

Challenges

We anticipate that implementing these strategies can have a substantial and sustained impact on mental health promotion of a developing country. However, there are challenges that a U.S. psychologist or training program interested in putting these strategies into practice may encounter. Perhaps the largest of the potential obstacles is related to securing funding. Funding of 4 to 5 years of training for an international student is costly. While this may be less of a problem for fully funded training programs, tuition-driven institutions may have more difficulty with securing the funds for such an undertaking. In our case, investing the wealth has drawn upon substantial financial aid resources from the training institution as well as private funding secured by the student.

Second, coming from a country whose social history and cultural norms differ significantly from those of the United States, the foreign student may find it difficult to fit in the American culture with its clear emphasis on individualism and materialism. This struggle to fit in may be further exacerbated by the student's limitations in speaking and understanding English. This may negatively affect the learning process for the student and significantly

decrease his or her performance in the training program. Programs recruiting international students may need to make intentional efforts to provide educational and interpersonal support to help ease the cultural transition.

Third, some students will decide not to return home after completing their education in the United States despite the intentional strategies outlined here. This should be viewed as a risk from the beginning. When this occurs, it is not all bad, as international students can contribute to diversity within the science and profession of psychology in the United States if they choose to remain in this country after graduation.

Implications for Professional Psychologists

The rise of multinational corporations, the ease and decreasing costs of international travel, rising ideological tensions that spawn terrorism and international conflict, and the globalization of communications have heightened U.S. psychologists' awareness of international issues, including mental health issues. How can U.S. psychologists get involved in helping develop global mental health resources? Although it may not be reasonable for most professional psychologists to engage in all the strategies described here, there are various types of engagement that contribute to international mental health efforts.

Travel With Training in Mind

Many psychologists travel to developing countries to provide training, and some return to the same country on a regular basis. These training ventures often provide helpful instruction in another country while also enhancing the psychologist's awareness of mental health needs in other parts of the world. One practical implication of the strategies we suggest here is that when psychologists travel they keep future training possibilities in mind. For example, a Serbian student attending a 1-week trauma seminar offered by a U.S. psychologist might be well suited for doctoral studies in the United States but needs some encouragement and advocacy to make it a reality. The psychologist can make contact with a local university program upon return to the United States and inform one or more of the faculty members about the student. The possibilities of graduate training in the United States can be pursued through e-mail correspondence. Training a capable student who is committed to returning to his or her homeland upon completion of doctoral training provides an ideal investment in the mental health resources of the developing country.

Mentoring

Psychologists with international experience can serve as mentors for international students studying in the United States. For those in academic settings in which international students are recruited, the opportunities for mentoring are apparent and easily accessed. For those in professional settings, it requires making contact with local universities to assess mentoring needs and possibilities. Though the initial obstacles to forming mentoring relationships might be higher for those working in nonacademic professional settings, the potential investment in the life of the international student can be enhanced as the student has opportu-

nity to observe and experience collaboration between the academy and the professional community.

Education

Professional psychologists with international experience can help other psychologists and future psychologists to gain a vision for global mental health needs by providing colloquia or seminars at nearby training programs, national meetings, state association meetings, and so on. These events raise awareness of international needs and opportunities.

Philanthropy

Some psychologists are in a position to make charitable contributions to help support international students studying in the United States. This can often be done through a local university or through another type of charitable organization that supports international students.

Conclusion

In this article, we have articulated one particular effort to invest the wealth of resources available to U.S. psychologists for the sake of enhancing professional psychology in a country with pressing mental health needs (Ukraine), and we have attempted to generalize our experiences in ways that may be helpful to other educators and international students. It is important to note that we have described only three investment strategies among many possibilities. Other examples can be found in the work of internationally minded professional psychologists throughout the world. Many U.S. psychologists are contributing to mental health efforts through publishing research, writing books, engaging in political advocacy, traveling for short-term service trips, partnering with educational institutions in other countries, providing online supervision and consultation, and so on. Each of these efforts has the potential to help underserved populations by investing the collective wealth of U.S. psychology for the long-term benefit of our global community.

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