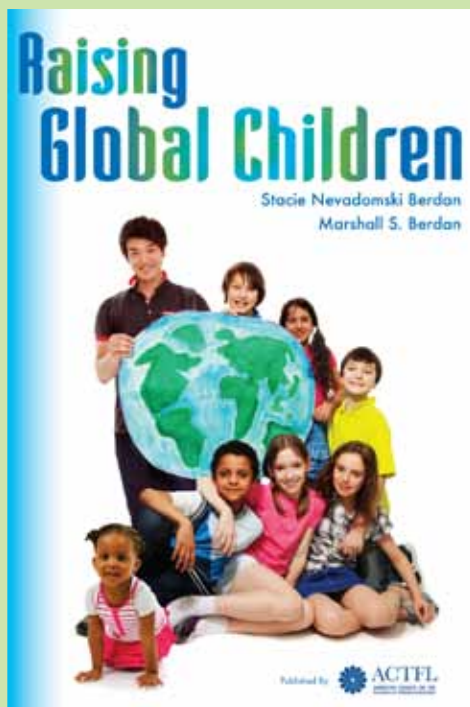


Raising Global Children

NEW
FROM ACTFL!

BY STACIE NEVADOMSKI BERDAN AND MARSHALL S. BERDAN



*EDITOR'S NOTE: Raising Global Children has recently been published by ACTFL. This new book, written by Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and Marshall S. Berdan, provides the rationale and concrete steps you can take to open up the world to young people—and to do so in a fun and entertaining way without spending a whole lot of money. Packed with practical information, hundreds of tips and dozens of real-life stories, this combination parenting–educational advocacy book is the first of its kind to detail **WHAT** raising global children means, **WHY** global awareness is important, and **HOW** to develop a global mindset. We present here some excerpts from this valuable new resource.*

Why are a businesswoman and her travel writer husband writing a book on parenting? Let me tell you a story. I had just finished speaking at a university in Nashville, Tennessee. The professors told me that my message was spot-on, exactly what today's students needed to hear from a global business leader. The career counselors talked about making passports mandatory for students beginning in their sophomore year. A small group of globally minded students shared their hopes and dreams for pursuing international careers. I left the campus in a buzz of good feeling that my message was getting across.

Then I got chatting with the van driver who had come to take me back to my hotel, a middle-aged gentleman who was born and grew up in the area and was now married with two middle-school age children. Making small talk, he asked why I was in town. I responded that I was speaking about global careers and the need for more global awareness among young Americans. His reaction was quick and visceral: "We don't NEED to know about the rest of the world! If we put our noses to the grindstone, work hard, and create jobs here in America, we'll be back to normal in no time—the way things used to be!" He claimed not to "want to put a fence around America," but, he said, "we have everything we need, and the world needs us much more than we need them."

I politely disagreed, offering a few words about how large mature economies like ours naturally grow more slowly than do rapidly developing markets. But I didn't want to argue. He fell silent, as did I. This encounter left me wondering: How can I get someone like him to help his kids?

We know that at senior levels, American professors, business executives, and government leaders tend to "get it," and many are calling for greater global education. But at the grassroots level, too many Americans still seem to think, like that van driver, that somehow things will go back to the way they "used to be."

My college talks tend to be well attended, but many there—and most of those who follow up actively after hearing me speak—are international students, not Americans. I am saddened by this and yet I recognize the exceptional qualities they possess. Most graduated from secondary school speaking two or even three languages and are already equipped with what academics and business leaders have come to call a *global mindset*: the ability to operate comfortably across borders, cultures, and languages. These students have the best of both our country and their own: a multicultural upbringing with postsecondary education here in the United States and the opportunity to find rewarding and high-paying jobs throughout the world.

Of course there are also American-born students with a wonderful grasp of international affairs and a positive attitude about working globally themselves. Many such students graduate proficient in another language or even two, despite the difficulty of doing so posed by American educational curricula. But too many American students, even at the college and graduate school level, seem curiously indifferent to the wide and changing world beyond U.S. borders.

At the elementary and secondary level, this disconnect is even larger. In my conversations with teachers and administrators in school districts across the country, a few common sentiments have emerged. Teachers who are interested in broadening the curriculum to include more foreign language learning, cultural education, and greater global awareness are often limited by a combination of budget cuts and parochial priorities. Parents, some fellow teachers, and local politicians simply do not recognize the need to begin global education until high school at the earliest, with many preferring to postpone it until college.

Yet most education experts say that it is not practical and probably not even possible to teach college students all they need to be career-ready upon graduation. For example, many colleges would like to make second language proficiency mandatory to receiving an undergraduate degree no matter what the major. But how can they advocate such a requirement when many students are not even able to study a second language for the first time until college?

It is neither reasonable nor fair to expect all students to become proficient in a second language at the college level without a significant amount of time spent studying combined with some immersion. And so campuses focus on the knowledge needed for graduates to secure their first job. But that first job is often only that—an introduction to the workplace. What is increasingly needed to go beyond that first job to a successful and rewarding career is a global mindset, and recent academic research has revealed an inconvenient truth: College is far too late to start teaching this global mindset.

Global Education Is Proven to Be Better General Education

Neither global education nor learning a second language is a component of the standard American school curriculum. But that doesn't mean it is wise policy, based on years of empirical data. Even without

including foreign language learning, research on global education shows that it also benefits general education by supporting critical thinking, especially in terms of encouraging a consideration of multiple perspectives, a skill identified in much research as supporting success across a range of academic disciplines and careers. Moreover, the reflective practices and consideration of varying perspectives that well-designed global education programs foster have been demonstrated to support analytical skills in all areas of education.

Effective global education programs can also encourage brain development by helping children come to grips with questions of personal, community, and national identities. Some researchers have found that the complex perspective issues that naturally arise in global education can assist with “open-ended, creative problem-solving,” and with the ability to “reflect on contexts,” useful skills not just for global life and work, but here in the United States too.

With respect to foreign language education, the benefits are especially clear.

Decades of research have amply demonstrated that learning foreign languages:

- Supports academic progress in other subjects;
- Narrows achievement gaps between different demographic student populations;
- Aids both basic skills and higher order, abstract, and creative thinking;
- Enriches and enhances cognitive development (especially if done early);
- Enhances a sense of achievement;
- Improves scores on standardized tests;
- Promotes cultural awareness and competency;
- Improves chances of college acceptance and achievement;
- Enhances career opportunities; and
- Benefits understanding and security in one's community and society.

Raising Global Children

In order to give our children the best opportunity to thrive in the new global world, we need to give them a global education. Working together, teachers and parents can raise global children, expanding their personal horizons while opening up a world of personal and professional opportunities.

When it comes to specific advice on how to raise globally minded children, we recognize that not only do we all live in different geographic locations, we are all at different stages in our lives financially, emotionally, and globally. Some of you may already be engaged in raising globally aware children and are looking for additional ideas to supplement your actions. You may have younger children, teenagers, or a mixture of ages. Or you may not even have children yet, but are interested in learning how best to prepare for their arrival. Others may understand the need for—and excitement of—opening the world for your children, but have little international experience and are un-

sure where to turn for resources. Some of you may even be afraid that your own lack of global awareness will be a barrier to helping your children become the globally aware individuals that you know they need to become. We all have different means and desires and so each person's approach to raising global children will be a little different.

We imagine that for every parent who already has the means to encourage global thinking, there are probably 100 who appreciate the value, but have little global awareness themselves. And you may not live in a town or even a part of the country that has much access to multicultural learning opportunities. No one has all the information to answer the variety of questions about lifestyles and paths, so it's best to tap into a network of globally minded people for insight, ideas, and inspiration.

The Content of a Global Mindset

So what does it take to raise children capable of living and working effectively in a global economy? Since 2004, Dr. Mansour Javidan of the Thunderbird School of Global Management in Glendale, Arizona, has been conducting a good deal of research on the concept of a global mindset. In *Conceptualizing and Measuring Global Mindset®: Development of the Global Mindset Inventory*, Javidan's rigorous scientific study of the drivers of expatriate success has shown that a global mindset crosses professions and countries. He and his Thunderbird Global Mindset Institute team posit the following components of a global mindset:

- **Intellectual capital:** Defined as knowledge of global industry and competitors and measured by global business savvy, cognitive complexity, and cosmopolitan outlook. Practical reduction: Do you have both the knowledge of global industries and the ability to understand complex global issues to get the job done?
- **Social capital:** Involves building relationships of trust and is measured by intercultural empathy, interpersonal impact, and diplomacy. Practical reduction: Do you have the ability to work well with colleagues who are different from you in order to inspire productivity?
- **Psychological capital:** Reflects and is measured by one's passion for diversity, quest for adventure, and self-assurance. Practical reduction: Deep down, are you curious enough about the world to explore and respect other cultures, and to interact and collaborate with them?

It's important to note that while these three types of capital interact and influence each other, a person may be stronger in one or another. Dr. Javidan's research corroborates similar findings from research Stacie Berdan conducted in 2006 with more than 200 internationalists (i.e., professionals who had successfully worked overseas), to inform her first book, *Get Ahead by Going Abroad*. Respondents there identified five life skills critical to success in cross-cultural situations:

- **Adaptability/Flexibility:** Internationalists must appreciate cultural differences and tolerate ambiguity. Foreign environments

require the ability to work around obstacles and find alternative ways to accomplish tasks. Global work and living require solving problems in different ways and adapting to the various ways that other people analyze and resolve issues.

- **Excellent communication skills:** How people speak, listen, and intuit can make or break a cross-cultural experience. Internationalists must learn to understand and be understood, especially when differences in language, culture, politics, and religion increase the odds of miscommunication. Nonverbal cues, such as culture, body language, reading between the lines, and interpreting the environment, are critical.
- **Ability to build teams and relationships:** Internationalists look beyond stereotypes and get to know people as individuals. They also appreciate the rewards of bringing together different types of individuals. This requires not only the organizational, time, and people-management skills that are important at home, but also the ability to reach across cultures and draw together people from different backgrounds.
- **Patience and persistence:** Successful internationalists maintain grace under pressure, going with the flow when things don't work as they expect. "Local time" and "local custom" mean different things in every country. Savvy global workers know that waiting and watching often outperforms rushing in and demanding immediate answers or changes.
- **Intellectual curiosity:** Internationalists are interested in—and open to—dealing with whatever comes their way, and they enjoy new environments. This curiosity drives them to learn about the world, especially history, geography, literature, and economics. The knowledge they acquire leads to an even better understanding of how to work across cultures.

In an effort to complement these two pools of research, both of which focused exclusively on business professionals, we recently conducted quantitative and qualitative research with approximately 1,000 individuals who identified themselves as having a global mindset. Out of a list of 13 traits, respondents were asked to identify which they thought were the top five ingredients of a global mindset. More than half of the respondents selected these five:

- Open-mindedness (89%),
- Ability/Willingness to listen carefully to others (67%),
- Interest in other cultures (67%),
- Flexibility (59%), and
- Curiosity (58%).

Parents and Teachers Working Together for Language Learning

While global education can be infused throughout the curriculum through a variety of strategies and tactics, language learning is different. It is a core subject and, as such, needs to be integrated into the overall curriculum in a systematic way in order for our children

to achieve proficiency by the time they graduate. We can't begin programs just to cut them and then start anew with whatever language or teaching method is currently "hot." We can't require only 2 years of mandatory language for high school students and then expect them to be able to master the language in college. And we can't choose who gets language instruction and who doesn't: According to a study by the bipartisan not-for-profit Council on Economic Development (CED), foreign language instruction is offered in only one-quarter of urban public schools, compared with about two-thirds of suburban ones. We need to follow a logical process of incorporating language learning for every student just as we do in math and science by establishing a solid foundation in elementary school that is then built upon throughout secondary school and then college.

To make matters worse, governments at all levels in the United States are investing less per capita today in foreign language education than they were 40 years ago. We're going backwards at a time that we ought to be moving steadily forward. We can't prepare our students for a global world without giving them foreign language instruction. Making foreign languages available to all K-12 students in the United States is certainly a worthy long-term objective. But we must be realistic; our school systems cannot be changed overnight. For starters, we just don't have the teaching resources available to do that. Many experts agree that it will take a full generation to completely infuse our national curricula with the combination of foreign language learning and intercultural learning necessary to prepare all students. But we must begin somewhere.

Some parents already have by successfully lobbying for stronger foreign language programs in the public school districts in which they live. Never underestimate the power of a few dedicated parents and teachers to change the availability of foreign languages in our schools—or to effect any desired change in schools. The following is a list of proven steps to take; your local school district's foreign language policy will determine your ultimate objective.

- **Find out the facts.** Ascertain your school or district's current policy and history with foreign language curriculum, including sources of funding. Most of this can be found on the school/district website, but asking fellow parents may shed some light as well. [. . .]
- **Support your local foreign language program.** If your school district has a program, do everything you can to support it. Treat your child's language lessons as being as important as math, science, and history; it's a core subject after all! Don't take the program for granted. [. . .]
- **Add or expand a foreign language program.** If you don't have a foreign language program at all or you'd like to have the current offerings start earlier, meet more frequently, or include additional languages, use traditional advocacy techniques to accomplish your objectives.

We hope that your eyes have been opened to the undeniable benefits and practical necessity of raising global children in today's increasingly global world marketplace. Unfortunately, most Americans still don't think global exposure serves much purpose. They don't see that developing a collective global mindset in our children is critical to both their individual child's—and ultimately the nation's—long-term success. Perhaps, in fact, you didn't believe it yourself for quite some time. If so, then you know that getting others to believe in the importance of global awareness is not easy.

But it is still something that we must work on since each "true believer" can be a force for convincing others within his or her own immediate sphere of influence. We ask, therefore, that you commit to helping others understand and appreciate the value of instilling a global mindset in their children by learning another language, paying attention to global news, and encouraging them to start traveling, both domestically and internationally. If you have some, share your own stories of cross-cultural competency and success with them. If we don't each do what we can now to bring about the necessary change, first in attitude, then in practical policies, we will all be the losers for it later. But no one will suffer more than our children. The battle is tough, and we will need a groundswell of support from small towns to big cities if we are to effect national and lasting change in our quest to raise global children.

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan author ID to come.

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