“A Truly Global Approach”: Opportunities for Increased Internationalization in Professional Military Education

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Background

Education is an essential aspect of the development of military personnel, alongside training and experience. The notion that militaries produce automatons that follow a formulaic approach is an anachronism at best. It has long been understood that the ability to think critically is a vital skill for military personnel. Lieutenant-General Sir William Francis Butler, the Irish 19th Century British Army officer, writer and adventurer wrote famously: “The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.” More recently, and perhaps more generously, the American four-star Admiral James Stavridis, who was, until recently, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, argued: “As military men and women, ours is the profession of arms. But it’s also a scholarly pursuit...The scholar and the warrior are thus inseparable—one and the same.” Professional military education (PME) is a vital aspect of the “conceptual component” of military power and its potential must be harnessed. The importance of PME prompted Lieutenant General Michael Hood, then-Commander Royal Canadian Air Force, to emphasize that there is “…a requirement to continually review the training and education we give to all ranks to ensure that it is configured to deliver what we need within the contemporary environment.” Indeed, all aspects of PM—both formal and informal—are worthy of review on a rolling basis.
Dr. Tammy Schultz, Director of National Security and Joint Warfare, and a Professor of Strategic Studies at the United States Marine Corps War College, has proposed that PME staff should “strive for the kind of nuance we demand from our students when confronting today’s and tomorrow’s wicked problems.” Analyses of PME have tended to focus on how much is required, who needs it and when, by whom it should be delivered and what material should be studied. While the debate about the relative merits of PME is contentious and continues to proliferate, its significance transcends the learning process. Internationalization scholars Hilary Kahn and Melanie Agnew have observed: “Knowledge is produced collectively in the 21st Century. Scholarship no longer emerges from singular and isolated sources of deep knowledge, but from international partnerships, communities of exchange, and interdisciplinary conversations.” The generation of knowledge—whether produced in a civilian or PME environment—is a collaborative activity. Globalization and internationalization have intersected to shape the development of contemporary education. Additional subject matter authorities Philip Altbach and Jane Knight pointed out that globalization and internationalization are “related but not the same thing,” noting: “Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st Century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment.”

Internationalization of civilian education has involved a range of endeavours, including opening international campuses, recruiting foreign students and staff, using international research as teaching aids and arranging overseas guest lectures. The concept of internationalization has found favour amongst civilian universities, but it is also part of the stated mission of some PME institutions. The U.S. Naval War College, for example, conducts “a series of initiatives undertaken in the spirit of…internationalization” to “promote ever-greater levels of cooperation and interoperability among the world’s navies and coast guards.” The prevalence of multinational operations means that, although it may seem less pressing for militaries, internationalization is both necessary and beneficial.

PME can serve as an important means to increase multinational interoperability if its potential is maximized. In advocating a “truly international exchange of ideas,” eminent maritime historian Frank Broeze opined: “It is extremely useful and worthwhile comparing one’s own service with one’s allies and opponents, learning to view issues from their viewpoints.” While defines diplomacy is often perceived as the principal driver for military educational exchanges, the advancement of interoperability should not be underestimated. Carol Atkinson has written that exchange programs “build understanding and trust necessary for effective cooperation and interoperability.” Even though discussions of interoperability...
have tended to focus on technological issues, the conceptual elements are at least as important.

This article will examine a number of potential options to further internationalize PME and, consequently, improve multinational interoperability, including an expansion of current international PME exchanges, using technology to create a networked international learning environment and the establishment of writing contests that accompany major exercises. Increasing internationalization within PME would be both feasible and beneficial. The civilian university sector offers a number of valuable precedents that could be embraced by the military, albeit in an amended fashion. Internationalization of both formal and informal PME has the potential, ultimately, to produce better informed personnel and improve multinational interoperability.

It’s a Small World and Getting Smaller

The comedian Steven Wright once joked: “It’s a small world, but I wouldn’t want to have to paint it.”13 The process of globalization and advancements in technology have ensured that the world is emblematically getting smaller by the day, but its physical magnitude remains and militaries are not able to shy away from it. Notably, universities are increasingly seeking to diversify and embrace internationalization. Perhaps one of the best examples is the emergence of massively open on-line courses (MOOCs), which attract students of diverse backgrounds from around the world. Universities have not only sought to reach out to a broader range of students, but they have also moved to collaborate with each other. By way of example, the joint initiative between Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, known as edX, offers a large variety of courses in a broad range of subjects that are delivered by faculty from universities around the world.14

There is no reason why an analogous course/module sharing initiative could not be established by PME institutions. Lectures could be delivered in a synchronous (live via video teleconferencing) or asynchronous (pre-recorded) format.15 Either format would afford an opportunity for networked seminar discussions involving multinational participants following the lecture. Internationalized on-line courses could be provided to broader or restricted groups of institutions based upon the desirability and suitability of sharing the material. For example, it may be deemed prudent for particular classes or courses to be restricted to established relationships, such as NATO or the Five Eyes network. Entire programs or degrees would not need to be standardized, but it may be beneficial for certain topics, such as multinational operations, to be considered from a range of perspectives. Any such initiative would not be without cost, as it would need to be underpinned by highly-qualified teaching staff with a sound understanding of the pedagogy of distance learning, but it would bring a number of benefits, including generating diplomatic capital. Networked multinational classes, most importantly, would enable students to reach beyond cloistered national viewpoints and better understand the perspectives of allies and adversaries alike—either through the teaching of international staff, or the input of students from various nations. Civilian education is now operating at the cutting edge of technology, and PME needs to do the same.

While formal PME at military institutions dominates the debate, locally-organized initiatives (such as at unit level) and informal endeavours provide a number of valuable opportunities. The Australian website, The Cove, for example, has organized a series of talks delivered by eminent academics from around the world.16 International lectures can be observed live via video teleconferencing to enable participants to pose questions and to interact with the speaker, but they can also be recorded to enable personnel that cannot ‘attend’ to benefit from the activity.
Equally, there is ongoing disagreement about the merits of civilian teaching staff delivering PME, as evidenced by Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters’ particularly pointed description of academics as “professors who couldn’t swim in real world currents without dragging down every lifeguard in sight,” and his assertion that “you should never let a rising officer near a professor.” Murray Simons, New Zealand Defence Force, has contended, conversely, that academics are “…good for developing deeper cognitive skills and promoting a holistic understanding of the profession from the civilian academic perspective.” The existence of a civilian-military divide is both unnecessary and detrimental to the provision of PME.

Military personnel—either serving or retired—are not the sole arbiters of PME, but they do have a wealth of professional experience that they can share with students, where it is relevant. Videoconferencing technology offers an opportunity to bridge another divide, as military personnel with relevant experience can contribute to the students’ understanding of particular topics in both a domestic and an international context. An academic lecture—delivered by a civilian academic or a serving or retired practitioner—on a particular multinational operation, for example, can be supplemented by presentations by senior national commanders from the key participating nations. Increased participation by guest speakers would enable students to reap the benefits of presentations from a diverse array of staff and practitioners. Each contributor would have a role to play as part a collective whole. The maximization of technology would enhance both the formal and informal learning experience, and increase opportunities for cross-cultural multinational understanding.
Have Lecture, Will Travel

The increasing involvement of international students or lecturers within physical classrooms, while more expensive, has been advantageous. The RAF’s Air Chief-Marshal Sir Brian Burridge observed, while serving as the Commandant of the Joint Services Command and Staff College in the UK as an air vice-marshal in 2001, that officers “…need to recognize that other nations may approach problems differently, a particular requirement in the context of multinational crisis management.”

Establishments, such as the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii, which facilitates an expansive educational program to encourage exchanges between military and civilian representatives from Asia-Pacific nations, affords a valuable precedent.

The current system of military exchanges in the PME environment is long-established and extensive. The unfettered exchange of ideas and beliefs through a variety of means—from small group work to social interaction—provides a platform to enhance cultural understanding. One study assessed that sustained contact between “culturally dissimilar people” in a PME context creates an opportunity to develop “cross-cultural competence.” Dr. Charles Moskos, a distinguished sociologist and policy advisor, has argued that interaction between multinational personnel can “make a big difference” in invalidating hostile feelings and building bridges.

Smaller nations can obtain a better appreciation of the culture and approach of likely multinational partners through PME, while larger nations that are likely to lead coalitions are provided with an indication of the viewpoints, skills and limitations of potential junior contributors. Dr. Erik Hedlund, an associate professor at the Swedish National Defence University, has assessed that:

“…the fact that most nations need help from other nation’s armed forces to defend themselves and participate in international operations…requires some kind of convergence, harmonization, and transparency of officer competence and officer education to achieve interoperability and be effective.”

The “bedrock for human and cultural interoperability” is, ultimately, being “consciously or, in some cases, subconsciously developed” during exchanges between multinational personnel in the PME environment. Even though only a small number of international personnel, relative to the overall size of militaries, will participate in overseas PME, the selection of the most able officers to attend the most prestigious institutions means that a disproportionate effect upon interoperability can be achieved as those individuals rise to the top of their respective services.

A straightforward enhancement of PME—for both staff and students alike—could be achieved through an expansion of exchange programs, which are currently focused on students predominantly. A coordinated and systematic exchange of staff at PME institutions could contribute to breaking down cultural barriers and increasing understanding between nations. That idea is not new to PME institutions, as demonstrated by the engagement of Royal Navy officers as faculty on exchange at the US Naval War College, and the establishment of visiting chairs at the US war colleges. There is scope, however, to expand both international inclusivity and the scale of exchanges, particularly in relation to civilian staff.

In reference to the creation of the Fulbright Commission, which was established by treaty in 1948, Senator William Fulbright declared: “The simple purpose of the exchange program…is to erode the culturally rooted mistrust that sets nations against one another. The exchange program is not a panacea but an avenue of hope.” A coordinated exchange program for PME, supported by each of the nations involved, would facilitate increased opportunities for internationalization. Importantly, while students can choose to limit interaction with classmates from overseas, the involvement of international faculty is a forcing function for multinational engagement in the PME environment. Ideas are both disseminated and absorbed through the medium of teaching.
by faculty and students alike. The regular interchange of teaching personnel—either military, civilian or both—offers the potential to reap mutual benefits for both individuals and institutions. Without any desire to generate uniformity, academic exchanges between PME institutions could enlighten perspectives and improve efforts to enhance the delivery of education in the military environment. Equally, the presence of international exchange faculty from civilian universities that are partnered with particular PME institutions may help to erode any tendency towards insularism, and assist in breaking down the “sealed-in military culture.”

As a subsidiary benefit, the establishment of a regular exchange initiative would demonstrate a genuine commitment to promoting progress in education, a notion that has been met with a significant degree of scepticism in some quarters. Furthermore, in an effort to diminish staff turnover, which can be ‘conveyor belt-like’ in PME, the prospect of international collaboration and research would help with the retention of high-performing faculty who are sometimes drawn to the often more bountiful opportunities offered by traditional civilian universities. Canadian researchers with international experience in the academic world, Harald Bauder, Charity-Ann Hannan and Omar Lujan, have summarized that “…international experience and mobility can provide the producers of this knowledge—that is, academics—with prestige and symbolic value.”

Aside from encouraging research and teaching collaboration, exchanges would help to boost the reputation of academics and improve their future career prospects. The end result of such an exchange program, ultimately, would be a broader, more varied education for students, and better-equipped and more-knowledgeable staff.

Exercising the Body and the Mind

Emphasizing that soldiers write more and better in their daily operations, as well as professionally, is a way for the Army to maximize returns—in the form of increased soldier competence, innovation, and critical thinking—on its investments in education. Major Hassan Kamara, US Army, who recently served as a Strategic Study Fellow on the Army Future Studies Group, believes that the encouragement of military personnel to “write more and better” is occurring around the world. The education of military personnel must operate on a ‘push and pull’ basis. While information and knowledge will be imparted by teaching staff at PME institutions, it must also be drawn out by personnel through a process of interrogation, discussion, and reflection. The process may rely more upon pushing than pulling (although in an ideal world the balance would be shifted) during formal PME, but outside of the classroom, the emphasis must be upon self-development.

New Zealander Dr. Emmet McElhatton has concluded that “…career-long professional reading, by supplying content in breadth and depth, clearly offers an important supplement to the professional content gained through formal education, training and experience.” This has been borne out by the experience of personnel during recent operations. The former soldier and US Defense Secretary General James Mattis asserted:

“Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flat-footed by any situation, never at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn’t give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead.”

Although militaries can attempt to push learning through projects such as the provision of reading lists by senior commanders, it is incumbent on personnel to seize the initiative and broaden their knowledge of issues both inside and outside of the military domain. Captain Andrew Hastie, Australian Defence Force, has advocated “a self-directed program of education where students are imbued with more responsibility for their own learning, promoting both initiative and independent thought.”

Personal drive and self-direction are important, but there are opportunities to accompany them with structure, even in an informal manner.

The role of essay competitions in encouraging writing has a long lineage in the US military, but the approach could be broadened. Multinational exercises such as RIMPAC, for example, offer opportunities for personnel to write about relevant issues. Voluntary writing competitions that encourage self-reflection, including the benefits and challenges of working with multinational partners, and essay
 contests that tackle issues of the author’s choosing that are relevant to the particular exercise have great potential. By incentivizing participation through professional recognition, essay competitions offer an opportunity to develop the writing skills of personnel. It would also help to generate multinational thinking on issues of relevance, as well as encourage a multinational mind-set. Former US military strategist, now the Director of the Business and Organizational Leadership at the Kansas University School of Business, Steve Leonard, has pointed out that “writing can influence change,” and the generation of differing viewpoints from personnel of varying ranks and from diverse countries can only be beneficial.33 Furthermore, essay competitions that are opened to entrants from all participating nations would have inherent diplomatic value. The ongoing debate about balancing training and education will inevitably continue, but there is the potential to combine both in some areas. In merging the education and training elements of personal and organizational development, writing competitions based around multinational endeavours would offer an opportunity to exercise both the body and the mind in a practical setting.

**Conclusion**

Internationalization has already begun to shape the PME environment, but there are opportunities for it to be embraced more fully. The exchange of PME staff offers the same benefits as military personnel, but it potentially has greater reach due to the capacity of educators to access entire student cohorts. Nevertheless, technological developments mean that the physical movement of people is not a necessary precursor to making PME more multinational. The rise of MOOCs is a clear demonstration of the potential of technology to network a global educational environment. Essay contests attached to major multinational exercises would incentivize continuing professional development and encourage thinking across cultural boundaries. Existing precedents could be built upon and tailored to the PME environment to suit contemporary military needs.

Internationalization endeavours are not about “absolutes and forced homogenization,” as it must be recognized that each PME institution is different from another—whether domestically or internationally.34 Internationalization endeavours are intended
to complement rather than supersede the domestic emphasis of PME, which will remain the primary focus. PME institutions, equally, need not replicate civilian universities, as they are not the same thing, and direct comparisons are not valid. That does not mean, however, that civilian academia does not offer important lessons that could enhance the PME experience. In the quest to improve PME, no stone should remain unturned. Commitments to students and staff alike in the form of time, financial investment, and innovation will be essential in improving the PME experience. While far from an exhaustive list of ideas, technologically-enabled multinational classes, PME staff exchanges and multinational writing contests paired to exercises provide opportunities to promote cross-cultural thinking and conceptual interoperability. These endeavours, taken collectively, merge the military and civilian; the formal and informal; and the practical and the academic. Internationalization of PME, ultimately, offers an opportunity to adopt a “truly global approach,” which has the potential to result in ‘multinationally-minded’ personnel.35

NOTES

19 For an explanation of this divide, see: John R. Schindler and Joan Johnson-Freese, ‘Civilian’ Faculty in Professional Military Education: Just what does that Mean?,” in Foreign Policy, 3 October 2013, at http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/03/civilian-faculty-in-professional-military-education-just-what-does-that-mean/. Accessed 26 July 2018.
34 Schultz, “The Road Less Traveled.”