Chapter 15
Fieldwork in Developing Countries: Preparing Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT
Twenty-first century teachers can become more culturally competent through thoughtfully planned opportunities designed to develop global perspectives. Cultural competence can be cultivated through service-learning experiences such as study abroad, thus maximizing pre-service teachers’ global preparation and future success within diverse classrooms. In this chapter, the authors discuss preparing undergraduate and graduate students for fieldwork in Liberia, South Africa, and Belize. The purpose of trips to developing countries is to teach and serve but also requires planning that acknowledges issues experienced by pre-service teachers such as anxiety and low efficacy. Upon completion of the Mercer on Mission trips, several pre-service teachers expressed their views about the usefulness of the preparation activities, which are explored within student narratives. Ultimately, the goal of the service-learning program is to support the completion of fieldwork requirements in exceptional contexts while adequately preparing students to be effective across a variety of diverse settings and activities.

INTRODUCTION

Mercer on Mission

Pre-service teachers can benefit from an international service-learning component while completing their coursework. Mercer University provides an exemplary service-learning model called Mercer on Mission (MoM), which facilitates opportunities for students to participate in acts of service where they participate in academic and cultural experiences. Pre-service teachers who participate in MoM programs DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2791-6.ch015
expand their global awareness by observing and teaching within an international setting. The design of international fieldwork experiences is directly tied to the Tift College of Education’s conceptual framework, which is based on the transformative literature of Noddings (2001), Mezirow (2000), and others. The goal of supporting students towards becoming a transformative educator is exemplified in the teaching and service-learning experiences in Liberia, South Africa, and Belize. The purpose of the MoM program is to provide students with an international experience, which includes cultural immersion, meaningful service, and growth through personal reflection.

The structure and requirements for students is that they completed up to 80 hours of classroom observation and teaching during the MoM programs. The pre-service teachers also conversed with peers, teachers, and university faculty in order to comprehensively prepare prior to and during this international professional practicum experience.

The MoM program teacher candidates visited three destinations, which included Liberia, South Africa, and Belize. South Africa and Belize however were not originally included in program destinations. Instead, program facilitators spent fourteen months preparing for a program to Nepal, planning and meeting with the participating pre-service teachers. Unfortunately, one month prior to departure, a catastrophic earthquake hit Nepal. Plans were quickly changed as less than one month remained to prepare a new program to South Africa. Surprisingly, the trip to Nepal was deterred again the following year due to a trade blockade and, once again, we had to prepare for another destination, Belize.

Description of the Trips

The Mercer on Mission (MoM) program trips helped to facilitate the completion of the pre-service teacher’s professional practicum experiences in international settings. Master’s level students participated in the Liberia MoM program at Ricks Institute, a K-12 preparatory school. Other master’s level and undergraduate students who were part of the Belize and South Africa MoM programs participated in a school outside of Cape Town, South Africa. All of the pre-service teachers within these settings observed, taught, and engaged in numerous service-learning projects.

Goals for Students

The goals for the pre-service teachers encompassed the mission of Mercer on Mission (MoM), “...to teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower and to serve” (Mercer University, 2017a). The facilitators of each program supported the students’ preparation through face-to-face meetings during which they discussed topics about schools they would be visiting, the culture of the country, and the expectations of the program. The pre-service teachers were challenged daily to embrace each of the components of the mission set forth by MoM. In addition, the students were expected to observe their new environment. Based on their observations and conversations with the classroom teacher, each pre-service teacher planned lessons that were relevant to the students they were serving. Along the way, they each were able to discover things about their teaching, themselves, and others that would later assist them in their classroom when they returned to the States.