Chapter 7
Planning Service-Learning Abroad for Teacher Candidates:
Teaching, Living, and Learning in Costa Rica

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidelines to education college and university faculty members who are considering the implementation of an international service-learning experience for their teacher candidates. The chapter begins with a review of literature supporting the benefits of service-learning for teacher candidates. Next is a description of a service-learning trip to Costa Rica planned and implemented by an education faculty member in conjunction with a cultural diversity course designed to prepare candidates to meet the needs of English Learners (ELs). Following the description of the Costa Rica service-learning trip, the author provides guidelines and a list of questions for consideration. The guidelines are designed to assist faculty members who are considering implementing a similar service-learning experience for their teacher candidates. Finally, the chapter concludes with quotations provided by participants of the Costa Rica service-learning experience that show the overall benefits of the service-learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

University educators are increasingly asked to prepare students to become members of a global community. Whether they specialize in business, medicine, or education, the concept of becoming a global citizen is part of the dialogue in higher education. One of the ways that colleges and universities are addressing this area is by providing international service-learning programs for their students. In these programs, students have an opportunity to apply their learning by participating in a service-oriented project. At the same time, students have the opportunity to explore another culture.

This chapter is focused on the planning of an international service-learning experience for teacher education students, or teacher candidates. The chapter is written from the perspective of a university professor at a small, liberal arts university who planned and implemented a short-term, international service-learning experience for teacher candidates that was part of a required cultural diversity course. The participants of this service-learning experience were enrolled in various education certification areas such as elementary education, English education and the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The primary goal of the service-learning course requirement was to prepare all teacher candidates for instructing mainstreamed English learners (ELs). The teacher candidates who participated in this two week experience worked as volunteer teaching assistants in an English immersion school in Costa Rica. The participants spent part of their day working at a school, part of the day taking Spanish language classes, and spent their evenings with Costa Rican host families.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidelines for faculty members who are considering the implementation of an international service-learning experience, such as the one described above. The chapter begins with a literature review that defines service-learning and builds an argument for the benefits of an international service-learning experience for teacher candidates. Next, the service-learning trip to Costa Rica is described in detail and is followed by a set of factors that need to be taken into consideration when planning a similar service-learning experience. At the end of this chapter, participant quotations gathered as part of an empirical research study of the service-learning trip to Costa Rica will be shared (Regalla, in press). Although it goes beyond the scope of this chapter to present and analyze all data collected, the quotations will be used to show how the service-learning trip impacted the teacher candidates and to support the use of international service-learning experiences for teacher candidates.

LITERATURE REVIEW: BUILDING AN ARGUMENT FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

In broad terms, service learning has been commonly defined as community service that involves the integration of an academic course curriculum (Berger Kaye, 2010; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Chapin, 1998; Jacoby, 1996; Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006). Although service-learning may share similarities with community service programs or volunteer work, service-learning is an experience designed to benefit both the volunteer who performs the service and the community that receives the service. What differentiates service-learning from other types of volunteer work or community service is the specifically planned integration of academic course curriculum. Skinner and Chapman (1999) make the distinction between general community service from community-based service learning stating "student community service is defined as community service activities that are non-curriculum-based and recognized by and/or arranged through the school; [whereas], service learning is a type of curriculum-based community service that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities" (pp. 3-4). Jacoby (1996) described the design of service learning as an experience that both connects academic curriculum with the participants' community service experience and promotes the participants' learning and development.

In order for service-learning to provide educational value for the volunteer, projects must include carefully planned and simultaneous integration with an academic course (LeSourd, 1997). Service-learning projects must combine service work with instruction and opportunities for reflection. As part of a teacher education program, the student learning can be emphasized by providing a service-learning experience at a school site with a connected course involving class discussions and written assignments intended to guide the student to reflect on their experiences and critically analyze what they have learned as a result

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