What Constitutes Help?
Looking at the Theme of Help Through the Lens of Global Competence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study is an account of how pre-service teachers in a study abroad context framed and examined the question of appropriate response to individuals, communities, and institutions with perceived needs. The authors' students worked for four weeks in a rural school in Malawi where they tried to help the students and community. During their experiences, the participants faced their limitations, cultural biases, and personal "filters." Hard questions such as "Are we really helping at all?" arose. Key global competencies proved critical as they shifted their perspectives in order to understand their experiences and respond respectfully in the context of the Malawian culture.

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

Core Competency:
- ◦ Perspectives are shaped by varied belief systems which create social affiliation structures, cultural norms, and build a sense of purpose.

Values and Attitudes:
- ◦ Valuing multiple perspectives.
- ◦ Question prevailing assumptions.

Skills:
- ◦ Recognizes, articulates, and applies an understanding of different perspectives (including his/her own).
- ◦ Listens actively and engages in inclusive dialogue.
- ◦ Selects and applies appropriate tools and strategies to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Behaviors:
- ◦ Translates ideas, concerns, and findings into appropriate and responsible individual or collaborative actions to improve conditions.
- ◦ Approaches thinking and problem solving collaboratively.
- ◦ Adopts shared responsibility and takes cooperative action.

CASE BACKGROUND

Malawi is beautiful, complex, full of heart, and full of contradictions illusions and realities. I have looked into the eyes of literally hundreds of children wondering… how can I help? And at this point my only solution has been to be present, in the moment loving each spirit I come in contact with…. Not judging what I see… and praying… hoping an answer will come. (Ann, June 30th 2009)

For anyone who visits another country it is vital to develop the necessary values and attitudes to make meaning of the experience. My students had to wrestle with their own cultural frameworks and how to put that aside to really see and understand another cultural perspective. Through my blogs and my students' blogs, I am going to revisit my experience and what I observed in my students as they encountered another culture during their study abroad journey in Malawi.

"What constitutes help?" I asked myself and my students that question over and over during our study abroad experience as we embarked on a journey to embrace the complexities and richness of Malawi. How do individuals with their cultural underpinnings make sense of what they see in a country so different from their own experiences? For a month, I watched how my students tried to reconcile their American values, and subsequent reactions, to their experiences in one of the poorest countries in the world. I reflected deeply on my own automatic response of giving and how that value was situated in my culture and beliefs. More specifically, I focused on the concept of *helping* as a core value which became hard for me to navigate in this country that has so many needs.

This chapter is a lens through which to examine how my students and I unpacked our own constructs of what it meant to help another individual, community and system by looking at our cultural assumptions of what people need within the

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