

Chapter 19

Serving an International Higher Education Partner Using a Problem-Based Learning Format

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ABSTRACT

Merida, Mexico, a community partner for service learning with Wheeling Jesuit University's (WJU) Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program, is a city with a population of 800,000 people. This city lacked rehabilitation services to treat cardiopulmonary conditions, and the school of rehabilitation at the Universidad Autonoma de Yucatán (UADY) had no established educational programs addressing these conditions. In 2013 two English-speaking faculty members from the WJU DPT program provided the service of knowledge-sharing to this higher education partner through an extensive cardiopulmonary rehabilitation workshop in Merida. The workshop participants included physical therapists, occupational therapists, a physician, and rehabilitation students, all with Spanish as their primary language. Written and spoken language was identified as the primary barrier to providing the necessary education to the international students. The WJU Basic Science and Physical Therapy Skills courses, written in the English language, follow a problem-based format where students are asked to use resources to answer questions regarding patients with cardiopulmonary problems. These courses became the foundation for the solution to the language barrier problem. The information and students' answers from WJU courses were translated by UADY university professors over a several month period of time. During the workshop, the participants were separated into groups, each researching a topic using the provided translated materials to educate the others on their assigned topics. The participants used various methods to convey their new knowledge. There were interpreters available at all times during the workshop. Surveys at the conclusion of the workshop indicated that the learning experience was effective and enjoyable.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education has the responsibility of providing students with pathways for cultural competence and the tools to manage situations where cultural diversity is a factor. These are especially true for students in the health care professions. Knowledge of the differences in the various cultures encountered in health care is vital to enable clients to receive the highest quality medical care; however, knowledge without action to meet the needs of those individuals may lead to poor outcomes. Students in the various health care fields will need to undertake activities that prepare them for competent care among diverse cultures (Leavitt, 2010; Rose, 2013). This chapter will demonstrate how one university followed its mission to provide a needed educational program to workshop participants in another country, overcoming the barrier of language differences by using an educational pedagogy that was student-centered.

BACKGROUND

Wheeling Jesuit University (WJU) in Wheeling, West Virginia, U.S.A., has a tradition of educational excellence while providing service to others. It stands as the only Catholic institution of higher learning in West Virginia and upholds the mission to educate its students to enrich their individual communities and to become global citizens. WJU affords national and international opportunities to students, through research and outreach, to use their God-given talents in service to others while preparing them to enter the professional world (Wheeling Jesuit University, 2015a). This university is home to various healthcare programs at the undergraduate and the graduate levels, including the opportunity to earn a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree.

The mission and the philosophy of the Department of Physical Therapy are strongly connected to the university's mission of educational

excellence and service to others. The WJU DPT program provides students with a strong foundation for clinical practice by preparing students for a holistic approach to patient care among diverse populations and in areas underserved by the health care system, locally and internationally (Wheeling Jesuit University, 2015b). The students are prepared through both knowledge and action to provide the highest quality evidence-based care to individuals. Didactic work in the classroom through a problem-based learning approach (Wheeling Jesuit University, 2015b), direct patient care learning experiences in various physical therapy clinics, and service learning courses at an international level expose the WJU DPT students to many culturally varied situations with direction from the faculty members. The unique nature of a problem-based learning curriculum coupled with clinical experiences offers the students the opportunity to participate in culturally diverse classrooms due to the intentional design of each portion of the DPT program.

The Jesuit mission of service to others and the WJU DPT philosophy of providing health care to those in diverse and underserved areas are supported through the Service Learning courses in the DPT program (Wheeling Jesuit University, 2015b). Local service learning is in the Wheeling area, upholding the WJU goal of enriching the local community, while international service learning takes place in the Yucatan, Chimbote, Peru, and Haiti, reinforcing global citizenship. One of the international service learning sites in the Yucatan became the catalyst for a different type of cultural diversity in the classroom for the faculty from WJU.

Merida, Mexico is located in the northeastern part of the country in a state known as the Yucatan. It is a modern city with a population of approximately one million people in its metropolitan area (Mexico-Yucatan, 2014). The city offers every modern convenience, but areas outside the city are often remarkably deficient in their availability of many types of medical care and equipment.

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