

Chapter 35

Assessing the Performance of a Cohort–Based Model Using Domestic and International Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the successes, strengths, and lessons learned during a five-year international Ed.D. program, which took place from 2007 to 2012 in Belize through a partnership with the Consortium for Belize Educational Cooperation. The objectives of the chapter are to (1) provide a brief history and explanation of the program including an overview of the Belize educational system, (2) explain how the program filled a need for both our institution and the country of Belize, (3) discuss the strengths and lessons learned in this cohort model for international educators, (4) offer a framework for other educational leadership preparation programs that might attempt international cohort-model doctoral programs, and (5) suggest implications for improving domestic practices through faculty and student participation in an international doctoral program.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1994, Oklahoma State University's School of Education began participating in outreach efforts to recruit international graduate students. Outreach work focused on recruiting students who offered potential for success in graduate programs in the United States; these efforts included targeted partnerships with institutions in Indonesia, England, Thailand, and Belize.

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While Oklahoma State University (OSU) was completing outreach work in Belize in the early 2000s, the Belizean Ministry of Education proposed a partnership with the university to potentially offer an OSU doctoral program based in Belize. After years of cooperative work between OSU and the Ministry of Education in Belize, administrators conceptualized a doctoral program scheduled to begin Summer 2007. The program included three years of coursework in Belize taught by domestic faculty who would travel to Belize, and three weeks of summer coursework to be conducted on the OSU campus. Belizean students would be required to travel to Oklahoma each summer to complete summer courses. Following completion of coursework, students would have from Summer 2010 through Spring 2011 to complete their dissertations. Support for dissertation work would be provided remotely.

This program proved to be highly successful. Faculty and students who participated in this endeavor experienced a rich culture exchange as well as professional accomplishment. Of the seventeen students who began the program, thirteen (76%) completed coursework and dissertations and graduated with a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree in School Administration from Oklahoma State University. Designing and developing this program through Oklahoma State University's Outreach Department required collaborative planning and preparation by many different stakeholders, both domestically and abroad.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BELIZEAN EDUCATION

The historical foundations of education in Belize can help to provide an understanding of the importance of strategic partnerships for developing an identity of this country's education system. In many ways, the education system in Belize, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary, reflects a strong European and American influence. In colonial Belize, the education system was modeled almost identically to England's education system, focusing on preparing children "for the values acceptable to Europeans and North Americans" (Lewis, 2000, p. 12). Children of colonial Belize were sent to England for education; those who remained in Belize were privately educated.

Many different religious denominations participated in the initial schooling efforts in Belize, including Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians. The disparate religious denominations sought to instill their own individualized standards and expectations based around their specific dogma; consequently, consistent educational expectations were not integrated throughout the country. According to Hitchen (2000), education was "organized randomly by the various denominations in British Honduras replicating the degree of autonomy found among the clergy in the Colony" (p. 197). The first formal school in Belize was founded and supported by the Church of England. Established in 1816 to provide primary education for impoverished children, this school was known as the Honduras Free School (Lewis, 2000).

Education became compulsory in Belize in 1915; however, formal education was required for only the primary grades, ranging from ages 5-14 (Mullens, Murnane, & Willet, 1996; Perriott, 2003; UNESCO, 2011). Secondary and post-secondary education remained a privilege to those with the academic abilities deemed acceptable by British standards or those who could afford it. Lewis (2000) noted, "The government did not see a need for compulsory schooling because of the lack of motivation by the 'subjects.' ... Secondary school was not an option for most children; exams had to be taken to enter a secondary institution" (p. 12).

Secondary schooling examinations were heavily biased toward European education. Belizean children learned British history to better prepare them for secondary entrance exams constructed by the British

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