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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

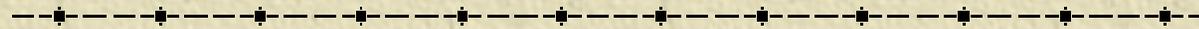
**MISSION TRIP TO KENYA: ENHANCED LEARNING
EXPERIENCE IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INTERNATIONAL
SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

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Mission Trip to Kenya: Enhanced
Learning Experience in Cultural
Diversity and International Social
Work Practice.

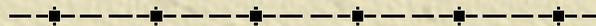


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Learning Objectives

- ✦ Following this workshop, participants will be able to:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of experiential learning
 2. Demonstrate an understanding of how to function effectively in another culture
 3. Demonstrate an understanding of competent cross-cultural social work practice

Introduction

- ✦ The social demographics of many American communities are changing
- ✦ Skills for competent cross-cultural social work practice essential
- ✦ Cross-cultural competency cannot be achieved through theoretical didactic alone (Parham, 2001)
- ✦ A practical component (experiential learning) is essential

Experiential Learning

- ✦ Experiential learning is a method of acquiring knowledge through engaging in hands-on activities (Kolb, 1984).
- ✦ Evidence indicates that students learn more efficiently by engaging in hands-on activities (Hammer, 2000).
- ✦ Experiential learning is vital in linking theory and practice in social work education.
- ✦ Confucius once said, “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”.

International Mission Trips

- ✦ Studies have shown that many students feel unprepared to work with clients from differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Arthur and Achenbach, 2002).
- ✦ Cultural immersion components in diversity courses provides an avenue for students to engage in cross-cultural experiential learning process.
- ✦ This presentation proposes international mission trips as an experiential learning approach to developing cross-cultural practice competencies.

Cultural Immersion

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- ✦ A cultural immersion experience through an international mission trip has the potential of helping students learn about different cultures in addition to understanding their own cultural heritage and its influence on their worldview.
 - ✦ This presentation reflects on a course that offered an opportunity to undergraduate social work students from Campbellsville University to participate in a three week cultural immersion experience through an international mission trip to Kenya.

Settings of the Mission

- ✦ Kenya is located on the east coast of Africa.
- ✦ Kisumu city is situated in western Kenya and lies near the shores of Lake Victoria – the largest fresh water lake in Africa.
- ✦ Nairobi is the capital city of Kenya. It is Kenya's principal political, economic, judicial, administrative, and cultural center and is one of the largest and fastest growing cities in Africa.

Mission Trip Experience

- ✦ Four female students participated.
- ✦ Prior to the trip to Kenya, students participated in a four-hour class session with the course instructor.
- ✦ During the trip, students were required to participate in all mission field activities, keep a daily self-reflective journal, and attend debriefing sessions each evening with the course instructor.

Mission Trip Experience

- ✦ On the second day in Kenya, the students attended a short orientation session with the course instructor.
- ✦ Over a period of two and a half weeks, the students were immersed in the local culture and had the opportunity to visit a local rural primary school, a local church, six children's homes, and a private Christian university.
- ✦ The students also had the opportunity of going on a three-day safari.

Mission Trip Experience

- ✦ At the primary school, students came face to face with the realities of poverty.
- ✦ At the children's homes, students engaged in observations, interviews, and community services.
- ✦ Over and over again, the students were amazed by the joy that staff and children displayed even in the midst of difficult economic situations.

Self-reflections

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- ✦ Self-reflection may help students develop a capacity to understand their own feelings, beliefs, behaviors, and biases.
 - ✦ In a situation of cultural immersion, self-awareness through self-reflection may help students develop an appreciation for the differences and similarities in the experiences, needs, and beliefs of various people.

Excerpts From Students' Journals

✦ **Excerpt 1:** I had the opportunity of getting to visit Kenya and have the most amazing and eye opening experience of my life. Upon arrival, I was initially shocked at the modern airport and busy city of Nairobi. We didn't sleep in a hut or have dirt floors, have to hunt our own food, and there weren't lions and elephants walking up and down the highway. And also to my surprise we didn't see naked children walking around the city with pitiful faces that haven't eaten in weeks... Television can be so misleading at times. Not to say that there aren't starving children, and that most people don't butcher their own food, but Kenya is not the desperate country that many people view it from the documentaries on television.

Excerpts From Students' Journals

✦ **Excerpt 2:** I have had many emotions these past few days. I love the children and the people here, but I want to do so much for them. All of which takes money, money, money. This is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen, my pictures will not do it justice I can tell you that much.

✦ **Excerpt 3:** Poverty looks so much different up close and is something I could have never truly understood without experiencing it firsthand. I was able to see it and it truly opened my eyes.

Excerpts From Students' Journals

✦ **Excerpt 4:** There is a big difference in how the American government and how the Kenyan government works and how they each help their citizens, as well as how citizens help each other in times of need. The Kenyan government does not have enough money allotted to provide welfare for their people who are in need of financial assistance. The Kenyan government, unlike America, does not have government subsidized housing provided for people, they do not hold themselves solely responsible for orphaned children, and they do not provide food stamps for people to purchase food from the grocery store.

Evaluation

- ✦ Although participating in an international mission trip may create in students an element of discomfort and fear, students reported that the experience gave them self-confidence, self-awareness, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity.
- ✦ Students also reported that the experience motivated them to be more involved in community service within their own communities.

Evaluation

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- ✦ One student shared that her experience at the primary school had given her the capacity to empathize more with students in poor inner city schools in America.
 - ✦ Another student noted that she has developed a deeper appreciation of a slow-paced lifestyle.
 - ✦ Another shared that her long held belief that all Maasai people were illiterate was quickly shattered when she met a professional Maasai man in Kenya who was a university graduate.

Conclusion

- ✦ It is crucial for social work practitioners to understand the worldviews of clients who are culturally different and to develop the necessary skills for competent cross-cultural social work practice.
- ✦ In the mission field, it is the responsibility of course instructors to continually encourage students to courageously and aggressively seek out learning.

Conclusion

- ✦ It is the responsibility of course instructors to ensure that in the process of seeking out learning, students do not engage in activities that could potentially endanger their health or safety.
- ✦ Additionally, course instructors need to ensure that students do not engage in activities that could endanger the well being of the host community.

Conclusion

- ✦ Well-organized mission trips for social work students combine academic learning with meaningful field activities and reflections. This helps students make the connection between field activities and academic coursework.
- ✦ Mission trips also provide an avenue for students to utilize social work skills and knowledge in real-life situations.
- ✦ Finally, mission trips provide an opportunity for students to grow in their personal faith with God.

Reference

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