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Service-Learning in Developing Nations

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Service-Learning in Developing Nations

In this chapter, we discuss two short-term, international service-learning trips where U.S. graduate students, faculty and program advisors (I/O trained management consultants) traveled to developing nations to complete projects in local schools. Drawing from these experiences, we discuss lessons we have learned regarding the challenges and benefits of the trips. Although it may be easier to imagine how people from nursing, construction or education might serve the disadvantaged, we have found that the skill set of I/O psychologists can be of great benefit to people who need to manage their way out of poverty. I/O psychologists can, for instance, teach job search, interviewing, and supervisory skills. They can help the agencies who serve the poor by providing organizational development, managerial and problem-solving expertise. The skills of researchers and grant writers can be of immense help to those who serve and those who are served. Service learning is of growing interest to I/O psychologists and our hope is that the chapter will be useful as a resource for professionals who would like to start an international service-learning program.

Service Learning

Service-learning is a form of experiential education (Dewey, 1938) that integrates coursework and community service (American Association of Higher Education, 2003).
The proponents of service-learning suggest that good projects will foster a sense of caring for others and will heighten self-reflection. Service-learning projects can also enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Fiske, 2001). Ultimately, service-learning benefits both the providers and the recipients of service.

While many educators have commented on the benefits of domestic service-learning experiences, a growing number of educators are advocating international programs (Bringle & Tonkin, 2004; Kiely, 2005). International service-learning projects combine the benefits of study abroad with the benefits of service-learning (Parker & Dautoff, 2007). Study abroad programs can increase cultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006), improve student self-confidence, heighten an appreciation for other cultures (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), increase international functional knowledge (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), and deepen an understanding of global interdependence (Sutton & Rubin, 2004).

Eden Campus, South Africa

Eden Campus was established in 2005 to help disadvantaged black and *colored* students (a technical term in South Africa meaning *mixed race*) gain the entrepreneurial skills they need to return to their communities and start small businesses. Students live on campus for two years during which time they complete courses and work as partners in their own campus-based businesses. These ventures include a small organic farm, a bee keeping business, a hair salon, a laundry service, a car wash, a jewelry shop, a mountain bike rental/tour service, and a video production company. While students are running campus businesses, they are also incubating ideas for new enterprises they can take back to their communities after graduating. For example, the Eden Campus founders are especially interested in eco-friendly businesses. One of the most promising ventures on campus is an innovative project that combines tire recycling, worm farming, and composting. This business can open in any community with virtually no start-up costs.

With leadership from entrepreneur Steve Carver, the campus was established as part of a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program. Except for nominal registration fees, students

attend the campus free of charge. All students come from impoverished townships in the region and they gain admission by being nominated by their community leaders.

In February of 2011, Eden began its sixth year of operation by instituting the Mini-Enterprise curriculum developed by Junior Achievement (JA) and Cambridge University. The school leaders had struggled with developing new curriculum and the JA model solved a variety of problems related to course content. The new curriculum requires coursework in financial planning, general management, stock control, pricing, marketing and sales. Upon completion of the Mini-Enterprise Program, students are offered an opportunity to take the Cambridge Examination, an internationally recognized entrepreneurial qualification underwritten by Cambridge University. In the near future, students will specialize in either eco-agribusiness, eco-construction, or eco-tourism.

The campus is located in the town of Karatara in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The town was originally established as a welfare community to house White displaced forestry workers. In 2006, faculty and students moved into an abandoned retirement home. Because the campus enrolls black and colored students, there was immediate tension between the community and campus. The campus has gone through additional growing pains as campus leaders have had to build virtually every component of a modern campus with minimal money, labor, and time.

Pre-trip. We recruited students from three departments on campus - construction management, clinical psychology, and industrial/organizational psychology. Our plan was the construction management students would assist with construction/landscaping projects; the psychology students would assist with job-seeking skills, business planning, and resume writing. Once we filled our roster, we set up three campus orientation sessions and we assigned readings. We used the sessions to set expectations, answer questions, and provide background information.

Six months before the trip, our students initiated fundraising projects for Eden Campus. First, students mailed alumni donation requests. Second, students and faculty in the industrial/organizational psychology program completed a project for MSU's on-site consulting practice. Students donated all the proceeds of the project to the trip. Third, students asked regional business leaders to donate outdated laptop computers. The students asked for computers that were too old to run the most recent version of Windows, but new enough to run Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a freeware operating system based on Linux. Ubuntu is popular in developing nations. This computer recycling project yielded twenty-two laptops.

One unusual aspect of the program is that U.S. management consultants traveled with our students. We did this for two reasons. First, most of the students on the trip were enrolled in the industrial/organizational psychology graduate program at MSU. We thought that the consultants would be good role models for our students (which turned-out to be the case). Second, we wanted the consultants to work on an organization development project on campus.

On-site. Once we arrived in Karatara, we spent two days doing group process exercises to help our students get to know the Eden Campus students. Nidhi Chaitow, a South African educational consultant, served as group process facilitator. Nidhi was one of the founding instructors at Eden Campus. Although she is no longer employed on campus, she is intimate with the ideals, history, and politics of the campus. Nidhi arranged nightly team building exercises including discussion circles, drumming sessions, and group music programs. The team building sessions helped all of the students get to know each other. The sessions created a sense of trust and openness and they refocused student attention on the mission of the trip. In addition,

Nidhi met one-on-one with our students throughout the 16 days and asked students to discuss their perceptions of South Africa.

Having professional contacts in the Capetown area, we met with local consultants in Capetown. The work we were engaged in was not their focus, yet we learned about issues and problems in South Africa. They described challenges in selection and leadership development with the relatively recent racial integration required by law with the large business clients with whom they work.

Service projects.   Students completed a variety of projects including painting, construction, and landscaping. Some students remodeled a storage room to create a spa/salon that will serve the local community. Others remodeled the campus store. Still others completed landscaping projects on campus. One group of students built playground equipment for the local grade school. Technically speaking, this was not an Eden Campus project but Eden Campus ran the project as an outreach to local community leaders.

In keeping with Eden Campus' goal of training leaders, an Eden Campus student was assigned to manage each project. Many of the Eden Campus students had never had a job of any kind. Further, many of the Eden students had grown up in families where parents and siblings were unemployed. Thus, some of the Eden Campus students lacked many of the basic knowledge, skills and values that come with holding a job. Organizing service-learning projects provided valuable learning experience for the Eden students.

While these construction projects were in progress, MSU faculty and the management consultants completed an organization development project where we interviewed the staff, faculty, and students. We then provided a detailed report to the campus leadership that included suggestions for organizational change. For example, with some recent staffing changes, leadership roles were not clear and this created confusion. We made several recommendations to clarify and strengthen leadership.

In addition to the projects above, the management consultants on the trip also held an interview skills workshop. During the sessions, Eden Campus students participated in role-playing sessions and received feedback about their performance.

Yachana Technical High School, Modana Ecuador

Douglas McMeekin moved to Ecuador in 1986 and worked as an environmental consultant for the oil industry. He quickly realized something had to be done to help people living in the Amazon region where poverty, environmental degradation, and poor quality public education are all inextricably linked. Thirty percent of children in the Amazon region do not finish sixth grade, and only fifteen percent finish secondary schooling. Students often drop out because they feel the current public education available in their remote communities is irrelevant to their everyday lives.

In 1995, McMeekin opened the Yachana Eco Lodge, and used the proceeds from the lodge to establish the Yachana Technical High School. Like Eden Campus, Yachana Technical School integrates academic and hands-on learning. All the students come from the Amazon region and attend school on a rotational schedule of three weeks at school and three weeks at home. The idea is to prepare the students to become entrepreneurs in their communities focusing on environmental conservation and management of small businesses.

Pre-trip.   Students in the graduate program in industrial/organizational psychology program participated on the trip. We met on the months leading up to the trip**. S**tudents were assigned to read: *Savages* by Joe Kane (1995). Two themes emerged in this book. One was a more thorough understanding of the indigenous culture.   Second, the book described the

invasiveness and environmental damage created by the development of oil production in the Amazon basin. We could see the clash of cultures as indigenous workers earned what to them was a great deal of money as a laborer in the oil industry. The substandard construction by the oil companies of pipelines through the jungle provided numerous locations where pollution occurred. This pollution ultimately flowed into the rivers, which are the lifeblood of the indigenous people. We could see firsthand how the conflict between economic development, and the associated greed conflicted with protection of the environment as well as the long-standing cultures of the indigenous people.

On-site. To get to the school, our group had to take a one hour flight from Quito, the capital of Ecuador. Then we boarded motorized canoes and traveled two hours up the Nampo River to reach the village of Modana. Modana has a few buildings including a church and a small medical clinic. The Yachana Technical High School sits near Modana, the eco-lodge and across the river from a large jungle preserve that is also owned by the Yachana Foundation.

The founder and leader at Yachana, Mr. McMeekin, is a study in successful entrepreneurship. He has the interpersonal charisma that many successful entrepreneurs possess, including the ability to influence and persuade. He is a conceptual thinker who effectively lays both tactical and strategic plans. The dedication and long hours he commits to all aspects of Yachana are his primary focus and consume his life. Mr. McMeekin has been honored for his social entrepreneurialism. We learned that he had created the Yachana non-profit foundation with a number of subsidiaries. In addition to non-profit initiatives, for-profit initiatives were designed to be supportive of and integrate with the non-profit work. The enterprise that Mr. McMeekin has created in the jungle and in Quito is highly sophisticated and effective, having won awards from National Geographic Society as well as other organizations.

Service Projects

We made arrangements for the management consultants to provide executive coaching with Mr. McMeekin. This was to affirm and support his leadership, and his ongoing growth and success. Unlike many entrepreneurs who have carved their own path, Mr. McMeekin was very open to interacting and working with the consultants to better understand how he could be a stronger leader. He quickly pointed out that succession planning for the organization was one of the areas of concern. Early in the process, the consultants were able to describe and document the many strengths he provided in his leadership. As with many entrepreneurs, Mr. McMeekin needed to delegate even more responsibility in order to develop and grow others to run the organization. While extremely healthy and vigorous at 68 years of age, he wants the organization to thrive long past his leadership. To arrive at this goal, developing ongoing leadership succession within the organization is critical. Various structures were discussed with him as well as methods by which he could be even more effective in this area.

While some of the details involved in the executive coaching process are confidential, this provided an opportunity to discuss with the students the process of executive and leadership coaching within the context of Yachana, a successful entrepreneurial venture. The consultants are continuing the coaching experience with a few of the key leaders within the operations at Yachana. This can be done remotely as Yachana is well equipped with communications equipment.

It was a valuable experience for the students, faculty, and consultants to observe a well-run, successful operation in the Amazon jungle. The well-defined roles, the overall strategy and business plans and goals, and the successful operation of the various initiatives provided a great learning experience for everyone. Many of these concepts are critical to the success of

entrepreneurial organizations in North America. Incorporated into all this experience was the variety of cultures represented by the indigenous peoples and the constraints and restrictions of a remote location.

Service Learning Lessons

Trip Goals

We established learning objectives for each trip. Typical goals included: 1) to help our students understand the complexities of culture, 2) to help our students better understand the complexities of race and poverty problems, 3) to help our students develop an interest and competence in service work, 4) to help our students better understand their own culture, 5) to help indigenous students gain project management skills, 6) to help students gain a better understanding of the skills that are necessary to compete in business. We found that these goals help define the planning and implementation of a trip.

Sustainability

The Eco Lodge and Technical High School provided a study in sustainability. There were numerous examples, which range from raising animals and crops for food to incorporating water power and solar power for energy. Use of animal waste and food waste was creatively used for a variety of purposes. There were times solar energy was not available creating a problem for the computer lab. A small hydroelectric plant was installed in a creek to provide a continuous supply of energy to the computer lab, even when there were long rainy periods, limiting the sunshine. The graduate students could see that this environmentally sound approach was done on a sound economic basis.

Dealing with Crisis

During our stay in South Africa, violence broke-out in townships surrounding Johannesburg. South African citizens were targeting refugees from Zimbabwe. The locals complained that the Zimbabweans, who were willing to work for food rather than money, were taking work away from already poor South Africans. Within two days, rioting spread to many townships in South Africa including the very townships where our students had just visited. This rioting lead to 62 deaths and displaced more than 20,000 people (Mail & Guardian, 2008). The violence, described by the local media as "xenophobic," was a wake-up call for our students. The students realized that, "South Africa is not as calm as it appears on the surface." Some students expressed surprise that violence could occur in a town where they felt, "welcomed and safe." Others expressed embarrassment about, "feeling naïve."

Although the violence was tragic, the students did learn a valuable lesson: things can change very quickly in communities where people are desperately poor. The violence also drove home the point that even though apartheid ended without a bloody struggle, racial and international tensions could still boil over. As one student noted, "South Africa is not out of danger yet."

The crisis was also a wake-up call for those of us who lead the trip. The riots highlighted the dangers of taking students to communities with high crime rates and minimal law enforcement. This risk can certainly be an issue when providing services in the communities that need it most. For more about this issue see Nelson and Ornstein (2002), and Stevenson (2008).

Facing Health Care Problems

AIDS is ravaging sub-Saharan Africa. As of 2005, over 30% of all pregnant women were HIV positive (Actuarial Society of South Africa, 2005). Over 1,200,000 South African children (aged 0 -17) had been orphaned by AIDS. Nineteen percent of all South Africans aged 15 to 49 are HIV positive (UNICEF, 2008). During our stay, we had the opportunity to meet

with Heidi Sonnekus who had served as an AIDS researcher for UNICEF. Heidi spent an afternoon talking about a large-scale project where she and her colleagues gathered attitude data from 5162 classes in 1418 South African schools (Andersson, et al 2004). Heidi discussed the scope and complexity of the AIDS problem in South Africa. She noted that there has been progress in slowing the spread of HIV but AIDS workers and social service workers are so busy dealing with the spread of AIDS that they have not had time or the resources to plan for a generation of orphans. No one is quite sure how the deaths from AIDS will affect the South African economy and labor markets.

The service-learning environment made the AIDS issues very real for our students. All of the Eden Campus students had lost friends and family to AIDS. All of the students could talk about the issue in a very personal way. Oddly, some of the Eden students had heard so much about, and lost so much to AIDS, that they were developing what Heidi referred to as *AIDS compassion fatigue* - a tendency to become numb to the AIDS warnings and AIDS statistics. When our students discussed the AIDS issues in South Africa, their comments reflected both, "a sorrow seeing how close AIDS is to the Eden Campus students," and a surprise that "some Eden Campus students seemed to be bored by the topic."

New Models for Education

Eden Campus and Yachana are unusual because the campus leaders are not tied to traditional models of education. For example, students do not receive degrees. Students work in campus businesses and they are expected to start their own business. Campus leaders expect students to return to their communities and help others start small enterprises. Students are admitted based on their perceived potential as community leaders. The campuses are managed without any government support, and campus leaders have a long-term goal for the campus to be financially self-sustaining. Although neither Steve Carver nor Douglas McMeekin use the term, Eden Campus and Yachana could be called *service-learning academies*.

The Role of Technology

Because one of our goals was to help students form meaningful friendships with Eden Campus students, we started an internet correspondence project. Each MSU student was paired with an Eden Campus student. The students were then given short assignments where they became acquainted with their partner. We started by exchanging email addresses but the correspondence quickly shifted to Facebook. Facebook allowed the students to exchange pictures and film clips, to form discussion groups, to post biographical information, and to use free live chat. Facebook also has a *people you may know* feature which records interconnections between networks of friends. Facebook then suggests people a user may want to connect to because of common links among friends. This feature quickly expanded the interconnection of Eden Campus and MSU students.

Ultimately, Facebook allowed students to get to know each other very quickly. As a student mentioned, "Every student was nervous about meeting students from half-way around the world. During our initial e-mail introductions, everyone was so focused on cultural differences that we were all walking on eggshells. When we saw each other's Facebook pages, many of our cultural assumptions disappeared." The students are still interacting over Facebook. This medium allowed them to stay in contact in ways that letter, the telephone, and even email would not allow.

Status Differences

In a service-learning environment, the service providers often enjoy a higher socio-economic status than the people they are helping. This disparity means that providers need to be

thoughtful about the way they serve. For instance, a long history of research in social psychology suggests that one of the best ways to break down stereotypes and prejudice is to increase social contact between groups (Myers, 2005). However, contact must be close, long-term, and on equal status (Pettigrew, 1998; Stephan, 1987). An issue with our trips is the MSU students were not on equal footing with the students from the various schools. The MSU students were much wealthier, had much greater professional opportunities, and were in the role of helper or "academic missionary," as one student put it. The danger is this, if students with higher socio-economic status interact as "helpers" to students in lower socioeconomic status, the act of helping may reinforce stereotypes and status differences. Thus a *White Knight syndrome,* as Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff, (1994) call it, can exacerbate social problems and slow change.

Another problem that can arise in a service provider relationship is passivity on the part of the service recipients. For instance, on the trip to South Africa, there were a few MSU students who had a difficult time dealing with what they perceived as apathy from the Eden Campus students. The Eden Campus students worked at a slower pace than the MSU students and they were more likely to take breaks to talk to their classmates. Further, many of the Eden Campus students simply did not have work experience so they were less confident than the MSU students. Thus, for a few MSU students, the Eden Campus students were perceived as under-motivated. Interestingly, this lack of motivation may have been an example of the conspiracy of courtesy (DiPadova-Stocks & Brown, 2006):

> In gratitude to those providing service, recipients try to please them by going along with whatever the service providers seem to want to do. The recipients may trust the providers more than they trust their own experiences and judgment. Also, those who render the service might be uncomfortable with their role, and not find ways to press the recipients for needed information. This conspiracy of courtesy, which occurs in interpersonal interaction, nullifies reciprocity and destroys the service credibility of the experience (p. 137).

A third problem related to status inequality was evident when the MSU students were interacting with local students in social settings where the disparity in wealth could be embarrassing for both groups. The MSU students are generous but many local students are not financially able to reciprocate. In some cases, this generosity caused students to feel indebted. One MSU student wisely pointed out to his colleagues how the Eden Campus were sensitive to the language that Americans use regarding giving and helping. He noted, "The Eden Campus students do not like it when I say, 'Can I give you this shovel?' They would rather we say, 'Do you want me to share this shovel with you?' They are also uncomfortable when I use the words, 'Can I buy you a drink?' They would feel more comfortable if we asked, 'Shall we have a drink?'"

Overall, neither the White Knight Syndrome*,* the conspiracy of courtesy, nor the embarrassment of riches were big problems, but in a long-term stay they could be. People considering service-learning trips should keep these potential roadblocks in mind.

Who's helping whom?

In contrast to the White Knight syndrome, many of our students suggested that they learned more from the trips than the local students could have learned from them. As one student put it, "Are we helping them or are they helping us?" For example, in South Africa, US students appreciated the South African students' spontaneous dancing and singing and their ability to, "have fun with nothing," the way they, "are happy in the face of adversity" and are,

"joyful and exuberant at the drop of a hat!" Our students learned that happiness may be less closely related to income, iPods, cars, and designer labels than they once thought.

Who Are We?

An interesting aspect of international trips is that travelers often learn a great deal about their own country by leaving it. One student mentioned, "It is difficult to understand my own culture when I have never had anything to compare it to." For example, students often finish the trips with a better appreciation of their own wealth. The trips to the townships and villages gave students exposure to a level of poverty that they have never witnessed in the United States. Beyond wealth, our students express an appreciation of the freedoms they enjoy in the U.S. In addition, students gain a sense of the extent to which U.S. media spreads U.S. culture all over the world. Students express a concern that, "the local students expect us to be like the people they see in U.S. reality shows and sitcoms."

In as much as the trips highlight the cultural differences, the trip also made many students aware of the commonalities. Most students are surprised to find that the basic values of people across nations are remarkably similar. That South African's and Ecuadorians, like Americans, are proud of who they are. As one student noted, "college students, no matter what background they come from, share similar hopes and fears, joy and sadness."

Distance and Momentum

Leaders in each of the remote schools noted that there seem to be a large number of people who are willing to visit and offer assistance. The leaders also noted that most of the people who visit are excited about helping and most make plans to return and/or arrange financial support. However, all of the leaders stated that few of these promises pan out. As Douglas McMeekin noted, "I have heard a lot of promises but people go home, and then nothing happens."

We suspect that plans fall through not because people who make the promises are callous or self-interested. If our own experiences are any indication, returning to the United States and our daily routines insulates us from news and thoughts about the schools. Because the schools are so remote, and because they are in places that are so starkly different from our lives at home, we are not faced with daily reminders of the needs in the schools. It is interesting, and tragic, that this problem is directly proportional to the need of the schools. U.S. news and media outlets are more likely to run stories about geographically, economically and culturally close countries than distant countries. Without reminders of the plight of these nations, it is easy let a busy schedule move plans to help on the back burner.

Aware of this problem, we have worked to keep momentum for each of the service projects. After the South Africa trip we arranged for one of the Eden Campus students to be enrolled at Minnesota State University. He was given financial support by MSU and the local community. This student's transition into the university was made easier because of the friendships he developed with students and staff during the trip to South Africa. Another development was another group of MSU students returned to Eden Campus to work on additional projects the following summer. Third, one of the MSU faculty members decided to take a sabbatical in South Africa where he is working with students an from Eden Campus and Nelson Mandela University.

As a follow-up to the Yachana trip, with help from one of the consultants, an MSU student started a master's thesis investigating the predictors of indigenous student performance in non-traditional school. He traveled back to the school eight months later to collect data. Mr. McMeekin and his team were interested in identifying and selecting indigenous students who represent the greatest potential for contribution to their communities. As a result, research is being completed on a work habits questionnaire, which is to be completed by applicants based on key characteristics that students need to be successful (not only at school but also back in their communities). A graduate student, fluent in Spanish, has taken this project as a master's paper. He will complete a follow-up visit to the Yachana campus, and with the cooperation of Yachana staff, this student will complete the necessary research to assure the effectiveness of this selection tool, designed to be one part of the overall selection process. Further, the management consultants who traveled with the students continued leadership coaching and succession planning for the Yachana staff. In addition to these efforts, the trip leader paid for a well-connected professional fund-raiser to travel to Yachana and meet the staff. The trip leader did not put any stipulations on the trip other than if the fundraiser liked what he saw, he would encourage his contacts to visit the school and provide financial support.

We have done follow up evaluations with MSU students to better understand the learning and value of these trips. We have found perspectives have been broadened and appreciation for other peoples' experiences enhanced. We have followed up, as previously described, with ongoing work, even after returning to the US. A formal evaluation of our work at the sites visited would be a good idea, yet has been beyond the scope of our projects to date.

Conclusion

International service learning experiences have been identified as a valuable resource to help students gain a myriad of skills, competencies and confidences (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Nowhere is this more important than in the field of psychology. Because psychologists and the clients they serve are culturally and linguistically different from each other, it is vital that psychologists gain the training and experience necessary to become multiculturally competent practitioners (Loe & Mirenda, 2005). Research indicates that the three most important components of training programs noted for educating from a multicultural perspective include the opportunity to work with diverse clients, experience with diverse faculty and colleagues, and coursework that includes issues of diversity (Coleman, 2006; Rogers, 2007; Rogers, Hoffman & Wade, 1998). International service learning opportunities provide these experiences and should be made available to students in order to produce university graduates who are global citizens.

Overall, these international service learning trips have been very successful. The students were able to make meaningful contributions. As importantly, students formed friendships with people they would never otherwise get a chance to meet. The trips changed attitudes and increased student confidence. They opened students' eyes to the complexities of racism, class, AIDS, language, and poverty. These trips helped students see how traditional models of education may not be the best solution in all settings. They gave students a firsthand look at the way that technology is shaping culture and a shrinking the world. Finally, the trips caused students to wrestle with the realistic yet conflicting feelings of hope and discouragement, charity and partnership (King, 2004), commonality and differences.

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