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Thinking and Acting both Globally and Locally: The Field School in Intercultural Education as a Model for Action-Research Training and Civic Learning

Abstract

We present the Field School model of intercultural civic education, service-learning, action research training, and collaboration (with local academic and community partners) based on field work in applied anthropology. Theoretical and methodological foundations of the Field School also include experiential learning and immersive pedagogy, multiculturalism and cross-cultural communication, international education and study abroad programs, collaborative international development, participatory research, and in-depth knowledge in one's own specific discipline. The primary goals of these intensive, short-term action research projects in other, less-developed countries or regions are benefits for community partners that are as sustainable as possible and to foster and assess learning experiences of students. The Peabody-Vanderbilt Field School in Intercultural Education began in Ecuador and Argentina, but we focus on Field Schools in China, rural New Mexico, and South Africa. In Guangxi, P.R.C., U.S. and Chinese students learned to navigate political and cultural complexities to study migration, community needs and assets assessment, and health effects of changing diet on children, and assisted English language learning in schools, a university and a factory. Native American students from Gallup, NM, and students from Nashville, TN, travelled to each other's locale to study the impact of diabetes in each culture and develop health education and other prevention strategies. In Cape Town, SA, students worked on health and education projects in three townships; we focus here on a collaboration with high school staff to study and reduce the high dropout rate. We analyze Field School impacts on local community partners and student-researchers.

Keywords

international education, civic engagement, service learning, cultural immersion, participatory action research training

Introduction to the Field School Model of Intercultural Education

Theoretical Foundations of the Field School

Civic education and service-learning. Experiential learning and immersive pedagogy date at least as far back as apprenticeship models of skilled trades training with guild masters starting in the 12th century. More directly relevant to practical experiential education in community psychology, development, research, and action are the ideas of John Dewey (1916) on the role of education in democratic civic learning and engagement. Those ideas were instrumental in the creation of the Department of Human and Organizational Development in Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, USA. They led to its substantial and structured internship requirements at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels and particularly its emphasis on critical thinking and service and civic learning at each of those levels (Barnes, Brinkley-Rubinstein, Doykos, Martin, & McGuire, 2016; Eyler & Giles, 1999). This article extends those ideas not only into the twenty-first century but also internationally and with a focus on intensive, short-term action research projects based on collaboration both between universities and with community partners in other, less-developed countries or regions. Here, we will emphasize the first two goals of service-learning projects: to meet the needs of community partners and foster meaningful, practical learning experiences for students.

International education. We focus on examples that include international, cross-cultural educational experiences.   International education is a concept that goes back formally at least to 19th-century notions that students should be exposed—by either a literal journey or a journey of the mind—to ideas across political and cultural frontiers with the goal of developing a less parochial "worldmindedness" (Fraser & Brickman, 1968). As international travel became more accessible, what began as mostly journeys of the mind in books and classrooms became opportunities to actually travel and study abroad. One way international education has

been defined is through its multiple potential teaching methods, purposes, and locations. "Professors and students can learn about other cultures by (a) studying those cultures in the classroom, (b) by participating in an exchange program, and (c) by providing technical assistance to other cultures" (Hansen, 2002, p. 5).   The hands-on, international action-research training program we will describe has been a combination of all three of those: classroom preparation followed by action-research projects and training in other cultures, usually in less developed countries and communities, in collaborative exchanges with faculty and students at indigenous universities and local community partners.

The questions we will address include, but are not limited to: What are the benefits and pitfalls of collaborative international/intercultural service-learning projects to both students and community partners? How do you maximize the benefits and avoid or minimize the problems, including challenges of being cultural outsiders? What are the pros and cons of alternative teaching and learning strategies? How can we best provide international education for students?

International service-learning borrows from many different fields and largely independent literatures. Those include the primary field(s) of the participants which, in the projects we will describe, include K-12 education, public health, and urban and rural community development. In addition to one's own specific discipline, those planning such projects would do well to review relevant theories, methods, and research on civic education, international development and collaboration, participatory research, learning theory, multiculturalism, cross-cultural adjustment and communication, and international education and study abroad programs (Crabtree, 2008; see Figure 1).

International Education
& Study Abroad

Civic Education &
Service-Learning

Cross-Cultural
Adjustment &
Communication

Development &
Collaboration

Learning Theory

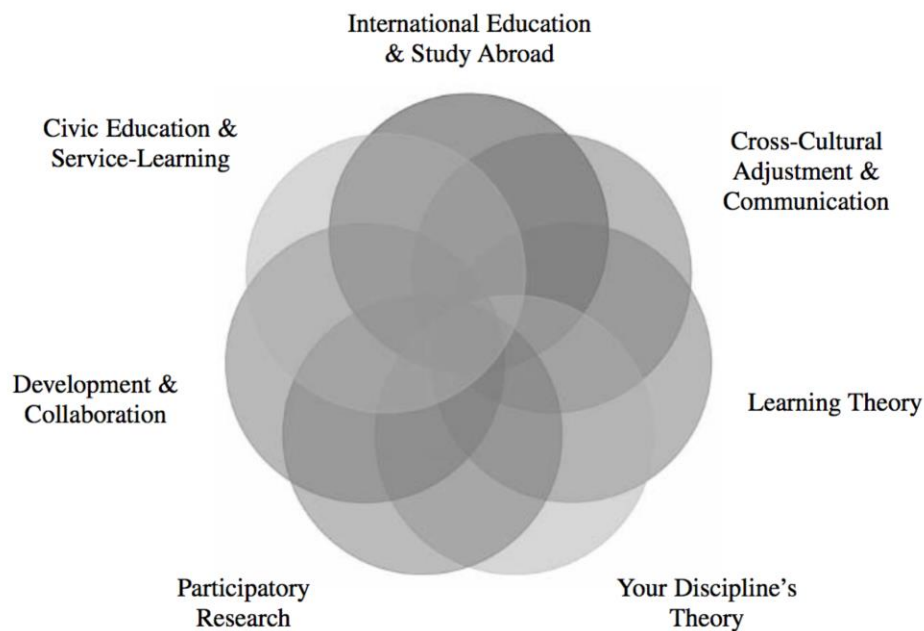Participatory
Research

Your Discipline's
Theory

Figure 1. International Service-Learning at the Intersection of Theoretical and Empirical Traditions (Crabtree, 2008)

As Karakos et al. (2016) noted, there are many important questions for anyone engaging in international service-learning programs posed by each of the key literatures identified by Crabtree (2008). Those include: from the *civic education and service-learning* literature: "To what extent do communities benefit from service-learning? What are the long-term student and community impacts of service-learning?" From the *community development and collaboration* literature: "To what extent (do applied student projects) address root causes of social problems? To what extent do communities participate in project design, implementation, and assessment?" From the *participatory research methods* literature: "How can communities be involved in all stages of the research process? How does participatory research improve both student and community outcomes?" From *learning theory*: "How does experiential learning influence students differently from traditional classroom learning? What is the role of critical reflection in transformational learning?" From the *cross-cultural adjustment and communication* literature: "How do cross-cultural experiences influence students? What factors facilitate such positive impacts?" And from the *international education* and *study abroad*

literature: "How has globalization impacted the ability of students to immerse themselves fully in another culture?" (Karakos et al., 2016, p. 171). Although these questions stem from particular areas of inquiry, the questions are relevant for anyone engaging in cross-cultural, community-based work.

The Peabody-Vanderbilt Model of Field School[1]

Community psychology and other social sciences have much to learn about doing culturally sensitive international field work and training from anthropology which has engaged students extensively in such work (Perkins & Schensul, in press; S. Schensul, J. Schensul, Singer, Weeks, & Brault, 2014). Not surprisingly, it was a community development applied anthropologist, Bill Partridge, who initiated the Field School in Intercultural Education for the programs in Community Development and Action and Community Research and Action at Peabody College, Vanderbilt.   The Field School:

> ... trains future professionals and scholars in international, collaborative community-based action-research and provides benefits to host countries and educational partners. It involves faculty; graduate and undergraduate students from Vanderbilt University and universities in less-developed host countries…as well as local development, health, and education agencies. By engaging in supervised research in cultures very different from their own, both students and local partners learn to: be more culturally sensitive; develop collaborative research skills needed for interdisciplinary team-work; understand diverse development policies and political dynamics and their impact; and strengthen human and organizational capacity for generating community ties (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 15-16).

The main on-site portion of our Field Schools lasts between 6 and 12 weeks in which participants work in teams with host country community and academic partners to address a local, commonly occurring issue or problem. In addition to service-learning activities, each team carries out

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[1] For additional information on past field schools, see Robinson & Perkins (2009), Karakos et al. (2016), and: https://my.vanderbilt.edu/perkins/projects/fieldschools/

primary data collection while learning skills such as participant observation, conducting surveys or focus groups, recording data, and preliminary data analysis. Eligible students must be functionally competent in the host language and have completed at least two semesters of relevant course work.

In general, our Field School model follows what Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) called democratic civic engagement, with an emphasis on purpose and process over activity and place (see Table 1). That means we strive for community relationships based on reciprocity and an asset-based rather than deficit-based understanding of community. Field School research is inclusive, collaborative, oriented toward problem-solving, and knowledge flows in multiple directions. Knowledge is relational, localized, ecologically and historically contextual, and co-created. An important aim is to facilitate local inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy, and the primary goal is community change that results from the co-creation of knowledge.

In the initial 2003-2005 Field School organized by Professor Partridge, graduate students worked in the Chimborazo and Esmeraldas provinces of Ecuador among Quichua and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples. The study centered on the impacts of programs aimed at building human and social capital in minority communities, through grants provided to bright but poor young people to finish high school, university, or post-graduate studies.

In 2006, Professor Isaac Prilleltensky led the field school in Buenos Aires, which focused on the struggles of poor people living in "villas miserias" (or "misery villages") as they are known in Argentina. Students partnered with several government and grassroots organizations to understand their plight and contribute to their community organizing efforts. They also partnered with local community psychologists to learn from each other about effective approaches to community building and well-being in that context.

The 2007 Field School in Southern China, led by Professor Douglas Perkins, focused on socio-cultural, health promotion, educational, and urban/regional planning aspects of community development in the context of social changes occurring due to mass migration, urbanization and economic changes. Partners included two Chinese universities, a hospital,

the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the host city, schools, and local public officials.

Table 1. Comparing Civic Engagement Frameworks (Saltmarsh et al., 2009)

	Civic Engagement (Focus on Activity and Place)	Democratic Civic Engagement (Focus on Purpose and Process)
Community Relationships	Partnerships and mutuality	Reciprocity
	Deficit-based understanding of community	Asset-based understanding of community
	Academic work done *for* the public	Academic work done *with* the public
Knowledge production/research	Applied	Inclusive, collaborative, problem-oriented
	Unidirectional flow of knowledge	Multi-directional flow of knowledge
Epistemology	Positivist/scientific/technocratic	Relational, localized, contextual
	Distinction between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers	Co-creation of knowledge
	Primacy of academic knowledge	Shared authority for knowledge creation
	University as the center of public problem-solving	University as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving
Political Dimension	Apolitical engagement	Facilitating an inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy
Outcome	Knowledge generation and dissemination through community involvement	Community change that results from the co-creation of knowledge

As university budgets tightened in 2008, funding for the Field School program, particularly intercontinental travel costs, became more of a challenge. In 2009, Professor Sharon Shields and colleagues returned to a

slightly different type of group exchange field research experience for students which they started in 2004. It took place in a poor geographically isolated community in New Mexico and provides a model for a domestic field school. Students from each university spent time studying at the other university and its surrounding community. The applied goal was to identify and enhance community resources for healthy living, healthy dietary options, and physical activity. Nonacademic partners included diabetes educators, public health and medical professionals, spiritual and religious leaders, and local residents.

The international Field School was renewed in 2012 thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program. Led by Professors Perkins, Maury Nation, and Gina Frieden, it was based in three townships near Cape Town and included travel throughout South Africa. The focus of work was understanding school dropout, early childhood educator professional development, and HIV prevention and treatment adherence. Collaborating host organizations included a high school, a primary school, a university and its HIV research foundation and student-run community health and welfare organization, and several other community-based NGOs.

Given limited space, we have not focused in detail on the specific challenges and barriers of each example, but rather on describing the examples and projects and their impacts on both partners and students, including what it means for student learning and for community partner capacity building and outcomes. We are not necessarily making claims of generalizability as to what it means for the theory and practice of experiential education as a whole, as the Field School model is quite different from typical experiential education models, especially local, domestic ones, but even most other international education programs. Rather, it is a different, cross-cultural applied research/service-learning model that could be adapted with other group projects abroad (e.g., as funded by U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hayes Program).

Three Field School Examples on Three Continents

We will now turn to more in-depth descriptions of the last three Field Schools, followed by some analysis of the impacts on community partner organizations and on student experiences and learning.

The China Field School: Learning to Navigate Political and Cultural Complexities

The Guangxi-Zhuang Autonomous Region ("Guangxi") borders Vietnam and is generally poorer and more ethnically diverse than the coastal and Northern population centers of China.   In the summer of 2007, 12 American students (10 undergraduates majoring in Human and Organizational Development and several other fields and two Ph.D. students in Community Research and Action) and one professor (a community psychologist) joined several Chinese faculty and students in social sciences, public administration, public health, and foreign language education to conduct four short-term collaborative community-based action-research demonstration projects. One focused on educational deficiencies, especially oral English language training at all levels from primary schools through universities, and resources for rural schools. A second project focused on the role of changing diets in the increased rate of childhood obesity, diabetes, and anemia. The other two projects focused on community development needs assessment and planning in urban and rural areas (Robinson & Perkins, 2009). These projects were identified by local university and NGO partners and were planned collaboratively by those partners and the U.S. team starting in the months before travel via email and Skype, with planning completed in-person during the first weeks of the Field School.

Educational disparities. Students compared educational resources and quality, especially English language instruction, in urban and rural schools. Our students engaged in participant-observation in English lessons at all age levels and found that rural schools continued to lag behind urban schools; more focus is needed on both rural educational needs and migrating students.

Health promotion. China has experienced major dietary changes in recent decades, causing a variety of new public health problems. A hospital and CDC in our host city requested help studying and informing their efforts to prevent diet-related chronic diseases in children (anemia, obesity, diabetes). We found that 18% of children in the hospital's catchment area had been diagnosed with iron deficiency, which was predicted by less

parental education, more hours worked per week, and children's insufficient consumption of soy and green vegetables (Magvanjav et al., 2016).

Urbanization and community needs assessment. With millions of workers migrating from rural villages to cities in China, and those migrants being legally "nonresidents" of the cities in which they now live and work, the need for accurate assessment of local problems and concerns has grown rapidly. Thus, the third project in this Field School was to collaboratively develop a Chinese Community Needs and Assets Assessment Survey measure (available online--see footnote 1, above, and Robinson & Perkins [2009] for the results) and train U.S. and Chinese students and demonstrate to local urban planners, other government officials and public administration faculty a quick and easy method of surveying residents, workers, and small businesses about city and neighborhood needs and assets.

Rural development/minorities. The fourth project addressed needs and problems at the opposite/sending end of the worker migration pipeline from urbanization. Chinese and U.S. university students and the Field School Director travelled to ethnic minority villages in the far north and southwest of Guangxi to assess rural development needs and the impact of out-migration on village life. Residents left behind tended to be young or elderly, which not only disrupted the family, but could affect the functioning of the rural agrarian economy, schools, and services, that were already severely limited prior to migration. As Chinese government officials were unfamiliar with the notion of participatory community needs assessment, and rural officials especially were suspicious of foreigners and worried about independent evaluations of village needs and problems, final approval for this project was delayed so long that students were forced to move on to a study of urban and rural graffiti that did not require government approval.

New Mexico Field School: Student Learning and Development in an Urban/Rural Cross-Cultural Exchange

An existing undergraduate course, Health Service Delivery to Diverse Populations, was revised to serve as a foundation to a cross-cultural exchange Field School initiative between the universities of New Mexico-

Gallup and Vanderbilt. A pilot exchange project had occurred two years earlier and examined issues of health disparities in both the Gallup and Navajo Nation communities in New Mexico and the city of Nashville, Tennessee. For this project, the course was taught concurrently at both universities with the intent of examining two different cultures, the impact of diabetes on these cultures/communities, and the development of strategies for diabetes education and prevention in the two communities.

The University of New Mexico at Gallup was chosen because of the demography of students it serves and the region in which it resides. The Gallup campus is located in McKinley County of the Four Corners Region of the U.S. Southwest. The majority of students are Native American and commute to UNM-Gallup from the surrounding Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo. Vanderbilt University was selected because its city, Nashville, was an increasingly diverse community with a population of approximately 570,000 of which 67% was white, 26% African-American and 5% other racial groups. Vanderbilt also housed a Community Outreach Partnership Center funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that served as a vital partner in our work.

As an academic and cultural exchange Field School, students studied Type-2 Diabetes in their respective communities and examined the services available, and the barriers to accessing those services. Twice during the semester, the two groups of students came together in one another's respective communities for an academic exchange of information related to each community.

An application process was completed for participation in this course and students selected to participate in the exchange from UNM-Gallup were a diverse group of Human Services (Health Sciences emphasis) students: five Navajo, one Zuni, one Hispanic, and one Nepalese. They were all females ranging in age from 17-50 and brought a wide range of college preparedness to the class. The Vanderbilt students represented various geographic locations in the United States, and five of the students were of African-American descent and three were of Anglo-American descent. The three males and five females, ranging in age from 18-23, were all majors in Human and Organizational Development.

The South Africa Field School: The Challenge of Creating Sustainable Change

The Field School in South Africa included professional and graduate students from three different programs, including masters programs in Human Development Counseling and Community Development and Action, as well as the doctoral program in Community Research and Action. Before leaving for South Africa, the faculty leaders identified local community partners that would serve as collaborators across four different projects in multiple townships outside of Cape Town, South Africa. In a short course that served as preparation for the Field School, the students were exposed to information about each of the community partners and their anticipated needs, and were allowed to choose the organization with which they were most interested in collaborating once they were on location. The following is a short description of one collaboration and some of the broader impacts on the local partners and students.

Five doctoral students and one master's student collaborated with a local high school named Gardenia Valley High School (a pseudonym). Although the high school administration agreed to partner with the Field School, the exact nature of the collaboration was not determined until the American students were on the ground in South Africa. In an initial meeting, the school administrators expressed a desire to better understand why they had an alarmingly high rate of school dropout and what they could do to curb it; they estimated that around 70% of students dropped out between 9th and 12th grade. In the subsequent weeks, the team of Vanderbilt students—led by a local Ph.D. student attending Stellenbosch University in South Africa—met with students, teachers, administrators, coaches, local police officers, leaders of local non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus groups geared primarily towards understanding the issue of school dropout and secondarily toward recommending some potential strategies for increasing high school completion rates.

Field School Impacts on Local Community Partners

We now turn to the impacts we observed of the three sample Field Schools, first on local host partners and communities and then on participating student-researchers. These impacts were observed and

documented through a combination of student and faculty field notes and reflections, student survey responses, and community partner interviews. The main methodological limitation is the possibility of social desirability effects, but at least in the case of students, some of the surveys were anonymous and students provided both critical and positive comments regardless of method or anonymity of responses.

New Skills, Knowledge, and Products

Native English was rarely heard in interior China, and so was one of the most important skills American students were able to provide to both teachers and students. Along with English majors from the Chinese university, they volunteered at local factories to teach English to workers. They held a workshop for students at the Chinese university to report findings and discuss issues of English language teaching and learning. The Field School Director visited again in 2013 and continues to communicate with and assist the lead academic partner in China.

Our jointly-planned study with Chinese public health officials involved training U.S. and Chinese university students to conduct and analyze a health and diet survey of parents and school officials. It resulted in a health education campaign by the hospital and local Center for Disease Control, and an article in a Chinese public health journal first-authored by a student and coauthored by our Chinese partners and U.S. students and faculty (Magvanjav et al., 2016).

The urban Community Needs and Assets Assessment Demonstration Project provided local Chinese city planners and government officials practical information and feedback informed by community voice. They now realize how helpful the information gathered can be in giving voice to resident concerns before their frustrations lead to serious political problems, and that by addressing the needs identified and strengthening and promoting local assets, planning and policy decisions are better informed and responsiveness of government is improved. The resident and small business survey measure that was developed (see above) represents a basic community development practice and skill, common throughout most of the world, but which was virtually unheard of in this region of China in 2007.

Despite those successes and apparent benefits for the China Field School partners, it is unknown whether or how much they led to wider and lasting changes in educational, health, or public administration practices even in that limited area of China. How to best achieve a sustained and wider impact for partner organizations, communities, and students, remains a question—one that would likely take an ongoing Field School or at least a long-distance collaboration to effect and monitor such change.

In the South Africa Field School, a top priority of the research team was to ensure the sustainability of any impact beyond the time of the in-country collaboration between the township high school partners and the American research team. There were three strategies used to accomplish this, each with varying degrees of success. First, the research team compiled a technical report of their qualitative research findings and relevant peer-reviewed research, detailing a variety of influences that both supported students to stay in school and pushed them to leave school. This report was discussed in detail with several school administrators in order to address any questions or concerns and provide supplemental information or insight as needed. Although the report was thorough and the findings discussed in detail, there seemed to be resistance to some of the recommendations. In particular, one of the recommendations stemming from the research was that allowing students to be more involved in decision-making would foster a sense of belonging in the school and keep students engaged. However, some of the administrators had been developing a strategic plan for school improvement and were hesitant to deviate from their vision without a more compelling path forward in place. Altogether, therefore, the technical report seemed to be an effective tool for detailing the findings of the research team, but perhaps not necessarily for framing the future direction of the school's actions.

A second strategy for cultivating sustainable change was the creation of a student tracking system in the form of a database where school personnel could track student data from the ninth-grade until they left school (through dropping out, transferring schools, or graduation). The purpose of this system was to identify risk and protective factors that might be associated with students' propensity for staying in school or leaving school. This tracking system was created in conjunction with school personnel and went through several iterations in response to their

feedback in an effort to maximize its usefulness, while still being user-friendly. However, this system was never implemented. Although it is difficult to know the exact reasons for the lack of implementation, it is possible that adding work for school personnel—even though it seemed minimal to outsiders—may have been too much to ask in a school where each adult had to juggle multiple responsibilities throughout the day. Additionally, although this school had more material resources than many schools in the surrounding communities, there may not have been an adequate technological infrastructure for sustaining such a tracking system.

A third strategy was to train some of the coaches in how to conduct an informal needs assessment so that they could continue investigating and understanding the issues related to school dropout. The coaches were in a unique position in the school because they were involved with the majority of the students in the school via extracurricular programs, and were often closer in age to the students than were members of the teaching staff. Therefore, the coaches were accustomed to talking with students about non-academic issues and had already built trusting relationships with many students. These coaches received a highly interactive and collaborative half-day training on conducting a needs assessment, including information about both the overall purpose of needs assessments as well as details about one method for conducting a needs assessment. It was difficult to gauge the extent of the impact of this strategy on the school as a whole, or whether the strategies were ever used. However, the coaches and extracurricular programs are still an integral part of the school, and these relationships may be helpful for keeping some students engaged at school and prevent them from dropping out.

We cannot be certain of the sustained impacts each of the various projects across the different Field School sites and years had on community partner organizational, analytic, and intervention capacity, local government data gathering, or resident voice; but we do have somewhat more information about Field School impact on student knowledge and skill development, to which we now turn.

Impacts on Student-Researchers: Learning Practical Skills, Reflecting on Cultural Differences

The health project helped the participating U.S. undergraduate and Chinese Master of Public Health students to gain valuable early research experience which (according to them) influenced their careers. For example, one of the four U.S. students on this project went on to complete her B.A. in International Studies, got an M.A. in Sustainable International Development, worked as an international health research intern at Abt Associates, and is now completing an M.D.-Ph.D. in Pharmacology and Health Outcomes. Another student graduated in Economics and Anthropology, received a Master's in Nutrition at Columbia University, earned her M.D., did pediatric infectious disease research at Vanderbilt, and is now a doctor at Children's Hospital of Richmond. A third graduated in Political Science and Child Development, became a Prison Fellowship International Kolbe Fellow in Rwanda, and is now working at the Harvard School of Public Health. The fourth graduated in Medicine, Health and Society, earned an M.S.N., and became a public health nurse and certified nutritionist and health counselor, and has taken medical service mission trips to Africa and South America.

The rural and urban community needs assessment demonstration projects gave both American and Chinese students hands-on training in practical research skills, such as logic modeling, survey development, field observation, writing and submitting IRB research ethics proposals, and basic qualitative and quantitative data analysis. As a result of the urban project, community survey methods are now more familiar to the participating U.S. and Chinese students and faculty.[2] The students on the rural project also developed a careful plan to use Photovoice with village children, but when that was delayed, the students used it themselves in their graffiti study and also created a photo scavenger hunt game in the host city for all the Field School students. In both community needs assessment projects, students learned about what topics are "political" or "sensitive" from the perspectives of both ordinary urban or village dwellers and government officials. For example, residents were openly critical about environmental issues, but more circumspect about other problems

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[2] A professor of Public Administration at the region's flagship research university had been teaching survey research methods for years, but had never actually conducted one until we provided the opportunity and political "cover."

they mentioned, including illegal gambling, drug trafficking and abuse, and government corruption (prior to President Xi's current anti-corruption campaign).

In addition to the article in *China School Health* (Magvanjav et al., 2016) and one on collaborative social development needs assessment methods and pitfalls in the *China Journal of Social Work* (Robinson & Perkins, 2009), this Field School led to a fruitful research collaboration on community-focused attitudes and behaviors, life satisfaction, and development of local political participation and social networks among migrants and nonmigrants in urban and rural China (Palmer, Perkins, & Xu 2011; Xu, Perkins, & Chow, 2010; Xu & Palmer, 2011). These studies addressed important questions, such as: How can China move toward socio-cultural development (social capital, appreciation of diversity, universal access to education and health care) and political development (democracy) at the same time that it develops economically and experiences mass labor migration? And how can it do so sustainably (without backlashes, oppressing minorities and dissidents, ruining the environment)?

Assessing Student Outcomes

A course assessment was conducted to understand and evaluate the impact of the New Mexico Field School on student learning and development. Due to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the course, the assessment focused solely on the co-curricular learning and development of students, whereas the teaching team concentrated on issues of content knowledge related to diabetes education, awareness, and prevention. The assessment concentrated on areas related to communication skills, leadership skills, personal development, citizenship, and diversity.

Various qualitative and quantitative methods were used, at different times during the semester, to capture student experiences as well as changes in knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors. The assessment tools used at both the beginning and end of the course were: *A. Service and Citizenship Survey* of student perceptions and behaviors regarding service, citizenship, and service-learning. *B. The Civic Engagement Continuum--* measured student self-assessed "citizenship" categories: community

member, volunteer, conscientious citizen, or active citizen. *C. Life Pie Self-Assessment* of students' proficiency and/or comfort with seven areas: listening, assertiveness, leadership, openness to new experiences, openness to new people and cultures, willingness to take risks and comfort with conflict/change. Used at the beginning of the course: *D. The Learning Style Indicator* assessed what kind of learners each of the students were and how learning styles can be used to complement one another. The last three tools were used during the course: *E. Guided Reflections*, both written and verbal, helped students integrate what they were experiencing and learning from course activities and major constructs within the field school experience. *F. Interviews* with each student approximately half-way through the course. *G. Small Group Analysis* of students' perception of the course and its effectiveness in supporting their learning was conducted after each group had visited one another's sites three-quarters of the way through the semester. Students responded in writing to four questions and then discussed their responses as a small group.

Various themes emerged from the assessment tools and from the qualitative data analysis of student interviews using the NVIVO software. The main themes related to five areas: 1) Values: Culture, Diversity, and Family; 2) Engagement and Citizenship; 3) Social Change and Social Justice; 4) Personal Development; 5) The Course: Feedback and Suggestions. Here we will examine the first two themes.

Values: culture, diversity and family. Student values were illuminated, challenged, transformed and reinforced through their experiences in this Field School. The diversity of the students and their backgrounds, not only between schools but between individual students, provided fertile ground for students' explorations of their values, assumptions, and preconceived notions related to culture. The exchange component of the Field School was deemed especially powerful because it provided students an opportunity to learn about another culture first-hand. For example, one Vanderbilt student shared the following:

> I am excited about going to New Mexico. To say that it is simply an opportunity to learn more about Type 2 Diabetes would be an understatement. I am going for the cultural experience also. To be honest, I feel that we are being

offered a wonderful gift, yet I fear that the students exchanging places with us will feel slighted. What interesting opportunities do we offer? I also fear that I will offend their culture by my ignorance. We all have bias and different stereotypes that enter our mind when we are confronted with change. I want to overcome this fear and maybe by simply immersing myself into this cultural experience, being open to new things, that may even question the very truths I hold dear…[Maybe then] I will achieve it.

The fears this student expressed, as well as the openness to share them, were typical of the students who participated in this course. The course/field school students were given assignments that helped them identify fears, expectations, and pre-conceived notions as well as ice-breaking and team building exercises that allowed each class to "know" one another prior to the actual visits. In addition, a number of teleconferences were held so that students could see one another and talk prior to the immersion trips.

Another student wrote about the similarities amidst the many differences:

For the past 18 years, I have been bombarded with textbooks, documentaries, and stories that have rudimentarily provided outlines of other religions, traditions, political systems, and cultures. Together, these intangibles have represented my understanding of culture. At most, they have provided me with an abstract command of traditions different from those with which I grew up. Upon reflection, what strikes me about my anthropological education is that differences have always been emphasized. I did not have to leave my country to discuss differences in culture whose life experiences were markedly different from my own. Though differences are certainly apparent, my experience in this exchange course made me recognize the common ground that bonds all of the world's cultures…there are challenges that must be universally met and overcome. By acknowledging the common ground shared by cultures everywhere, we might be able to take steps to address inequalities by treating human beings with dignity.

Engagement and citizenship. One of the goals of the course was to increase students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship, democracy, and civility. The Citizenship Continuum demonstrated that students in this class viewed themselves as engaged in the community to a degree beyond simply being a "Member". As part of the final examination, students were asked about their definitions and understanding of democracy and citizenship. It became apparent that students typically associated these terms mainly with such activities as voting, but did not see other types of engagement such as community service and service-learning as integrally related to both citizenship and democracy. It seemed, through discussions with students, that although they only viewed these words as concepts, they began putting these concepts "into practice" as the course progressed. One student shared:

> My sense of democracy, civility and citizenship has changed from the "them" perspective to the "us." I have learned that trust is at the core of authentic engagement and with time we can build civility and a citizenry of respect within our community. It starts with me.

In a course such as this, a certain level of growth in students' self-awareness is both hoped for and expected. Exposing students to different cultures and affording learning experiences in the community that reinforce course content seems to provide a solid foundation for such personal growth to occur. Another student reported:

> In the past I have compared my background to my counterparts. I do not have some of the privilege my peers enjoy, but in the past I was not looking in the mirror. My impact on the world has very little to do with others, it starts with the woman in the mirror, it [is] first and foremost about me changing.

Challenges of Creating Sustainable Community Change and Foreign Partnerships

For the research team working with the South African High School, the Field School experience was exciting and challenging. The level of

community collaboration and trusting relationships developed within a short time period (approximately 5-6 weeks) was a deeply impactful experience, and the team members felt grateful for the community for their enthusiasm and willingness to partner so whole-heartedly. However, that quickly-built trust also made the experience of leaving with few guarantees of sustainability all the more disappointing. Despite the team's best efforts to develop multiple strategies to support sustainability, the intended ongoing connections and collaborations across the Atlantic did not come to fruition as hoped. For each team member and their diverging career paths, this has resulted in different lessons learned. For some, this experience reinforced the excitement of community-based work, and the importance of longer-term collaborations and local partnerships to maintain the work. For others, it made evident the necessity of considering the role of the multiple contexts of individuals and organizations when studying social phenomena, and challenged assumptions about which contexts are worth examining. For all partners in the project, however, this work was certainly an opportunity to experience new challenges, and to learn and grow in response.

Conclusions

What the preceding examples of the Field School in Intercultural Education show is that meeting the needs of community partners and expecting lasting change after just six-to-twelve weeks (in reality, less given orientation and other travel) of a project conducted by pre-professional students in training is perhaps the model's biggest challenge. Yet new knowledge and skills were gained by partners in each Field School that at least have the potential for leading to sustainable positive and substantial local impacts. The clearer evidence of influence, however, was in fostering meaningful practical and cultural learning experiences for participating students, both those from Vanderbilt and from the partner universities. Although our evidence is limited and possibly biased, none of our community partners ever gave any indication of being harmed, inconvenienced, or overburdened, and were uniformly welcoming and gracious in their appreciation of students' help. If true, this suggests that despite the costs and challenges, the Field School model has a net positive value overall.

Some specific lessons for maximizing benefits and avoiding or minimizing problems include extending both preparation time and the Field School itself for as long as possible, working to fit in regular meaningful reflection time to process successes and especially setbacks, and to do so using whatever methods work best for the particular student or group, committing to following up on projects with partners to ensure sustainability, managing both community partner and student expectations through clear, open and honest communication, and realizing that field work is messy and unpredictable and understanding that as an integral part of the learning experience.

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