

Chapter 65

Study Abroad and Service– Learning in a Catholic Social Teaching Context: The Implications for Teacher Education and Social Justice

Ana-Lisa Gonzalez

University of St. Thomas – Houston, USA

J. Ulyses Balderas

University of St. Thomas, USA

ABSTRACT

Authentic, practical and realistic experiences for pre-service teachers are essential to any effective teacher education program. If combined with two high-impact educational practices: service learning and study abroad, can result in an inclusive and successful education program. Study abroad with a carefully crafted service-learning component would help pre-service teachers to not only, immerse themselves in a foreign culture, but also to refine their craft in that same context. On a Catholic university campus there exists the unique opportunity to include faith in all coursework and experiences that students may have. The application of Catholic Social Teachings, especially the tenets of social justice, should be a major part of what drives pre-service teachers in the classroom. Coursework that has a social justice bend and experiences that reflect the ideals of social justice according to the Catholic Church can prove to be highly impactful if well-designed.

INTRODUCTION

The structure of a teacher education program is of immense importance to the success of the individual teacher in his or her impending classroom. Every detail of the program contributes to the effectiveness in that the pre-service teachers leave prepared to apply their knowledge. Development of the program must be thoughtful and thorough. When the teacher education program is housed on a parochial campus,

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options for coursework and initiatives are broadened. For example, when developing a teacher education program on a Catholic university campus, special consideration can be given to Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST is a pillar of Catholic education and should be addressed when determining what will and should be included in a program that trains educators that will potentially serve on campuses that will include diverse populations. Social justice as defined by CST is especially important to consider in teacher education when considering the populations and wide reach that education has. Service-learning, which is an integral part of any program, allows for the application of the many aspects of CST. Further, study abroad that includes a component of service-learning can perhaps further the principles of CST by providing college students with cross-cultural experiences that will extend their service learning endeavors beyond the immediate context. Both service-learning and study abroad are considered to be high-impact educational practices that enhance the experience for college students. The implications for the exploration of the relation that exists between service learning and study abroad within a framework of CST and the affect it has on not only college student success, but also specifically teacher success and understanding of the multiple cultures from which our students hail, is important to that success. It is the primary concern of this review to explore that relationship so as to develop a framework from which an effective model for teacher education, service-learning, and study abroad and the co-existence among them can be established. It is equally as important to consider this framework within a Catholic university context. One such university, the University of St. Thomas in Houston, has begun to implement a particular model that illustrates the importance of this structural addition to enhance the experiences of its pre-service teachers.

Teacher education purports the preparation of educators that will be well-equipped to attend to the needs of all pre-service teachers in any given context. These pre-service teachers have been admitted to the teacher education program, but have yet to complete all requirements to become a fully certified teacher. Teacher education programs will include particular standards of coursework, field experience hours that are required and on occasion service-learning projects that may or may not fall under the umbrella of these experiences. In recent years, the call for teacher training that includes a focus on the diversity that pre-service teachers will face with regard to student individual differences and context has been made to teacher education programs. Multicultural education, diversity training, and contextualized instruction are only a few of the headers under which many programs impart such information (Cushner, 2007; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Merryfield, 2000; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Wiest, 2004; Zhao, 2007). Many scholars believe that extensive training is needed across teacher education programs and school districts, as the population that comprises public schools is reflective of the cultural, ethnic, language, and intellectual differences that we see in society as a whole (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Nieto, 2000).

Several scholars assert that many universities may not be contending with the issues that teachers face with regard to equity, diversity and global interconnectedness (Merryfield, 2000). Still others write that teacher educators and policy makers need to take the reins in closing the social and cultural gaps that exist between students and teachers across grade levels (Cockrell et al., 1999; Kugelmass, 2000). Butcher et al, (2003) calls for teacher education programs to revamp approaches to teacher education so as to develop educators that consider certain structural injustices in our society and commit themselves to teaching in such a way that will address these “injustices.” Further, Nieto (2000) contends that educators and policy makers alike should consider social justice and diversity in a more direct and measurable way. It seems intuitive to offer coursework that is specific to the diversity that exists in our public and private schools, but also we need to consider the application of that information. Service-learning

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