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Reciprocity and Reflection in Community-based Study Abroad Courses in Rural Costa Rica

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Ballard, G. D., & Murray, S. (2017), Educators continually examine the best practices for their disciplines. Both Spanish and education can truly be enhanced through more hands-on activities implemented through a community-based pedagogical approach. Students learning Spanish, benefit from the opportunity to speak the language to native speakers while immersed in the culture. While future educators need the chance to interact with students and to practice teaching/facilitating activities. Thus, collaborating on a community-based study abroad class in rural Costa Rica made perfect sense for both an education and Spanish professor. The literature supports the value of implementing a community-based approach in teacher preparation as a means of learning about different cultures and correcting misconceptions that future educators might have about those particular groups (Cooper, 2007). Thus a cultural exchange will be examined through the framework of two courses, Spanish and education, offered in Costa Rica in January 2010. The following will be described: professors leading the trip, course structure, the local Costa Rican school setting, students enrolled, reflection on experiences during the trip, lessons learned, and future directions. Literature Review The two high impact practices brought together were community-based learning and study abroad. Independently, both practices have often proven to provide life changing experiences. Thus one can only imagine the effects of bringing both practices together. The concept of community-based study abroad courses is not something new. However, the terminology used to describe such an experience differs

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Cover Page Footnote

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This manuscript will examine two high-impact practices in academia, community-based learning, and study abroad. The authors discuss the benefits of both practices and how pairing the two can benefit not only future educators but future leaders. This model provides students with the opportunity to become more globally competent through their time in another culture. Throughout this immersion, college students taught English in the context of reading, mathematics, science, or social studies. Critical and analytical reflection was a significant aspect of their college course. At the conclusion of their community-based study abroad course, students were asked to synthesize a final report referencing earlier reflections. Experiences both positive and negative are shared to provide a realistic picture of how college students might maneuver the dual role of student and community provider.

Educators continually examine the best practices for their disciplines. Both Spanish and education can truly be enhanced through more hands-on activities implemented through a community-based pedagogical approach. Students learning Spanish, benefit from the opportunity to speak the language to native speakers while immersed in the culture. While future educators need the chance to interact with students and to practice teaching/facilitating activities. Thus, collaborating on a community-based study abroad class in rural Costa Rica made perfect sense for both an education and Spanish professor. The literature supports the value of implementing a community-based approach in teacher preparation as a means of learning about different cultures and correcting misconceptions that future educators might have about those particular groups (Cooper, 2007).

We examined a cultural exchange through the framework of two courses, Spanish and education, offered in Costa Rica in January 2010. The following will be described: professors leading the trip, course structure, the local Costa Rican school setting, students enrolled, reflection on experiences during the trip, lessons learned, and future directions.

Literature Review

The two high-impact practices brought together were community-based learning and study abroad. Independently, both practices have often proven to provide life-changing experiences. Thus one can only imagine the effects of bringing both practices together. The concept of community-based study abroad courses is not something new. However, the terminology used to describe such an experience differs throughout the literature. Such practices may be described as international service learning, community-based learning, civic engagement, or experiential learning. How these practices are implemented can vary greatly depending on the group of students, geographic location, and local coordinators. Having a shared understanding or vision between both parties, the college program, and local community coordinator, is extremely important.

By sharing reflective experiences with one another, professors can learn from and improve upon the overall implementation of future community-based study abroad courses. Hautzinger (2008), for example, shared reflections from her course entitled *Building Citizenship in New Democracies: Work Placements in Bahia, Brazil*.

Her course raised an interesting question "...whether students could be 'of service' in places where they don't speak the languages, have individual relationships, or understand the rudiments of deep and recent histories. How much could students, in fact, learn when cut loose to 'work' in communities where they are outsiders of *de facto* cultural infancy?" (Hautzinger, 2008, p. 192). Raising this significant question causes one to consider the overall structure and purpose of a community-based study abroad course. Can such a course be transformational for both the students and the community? How can professors encourage a sense of reciprocity? Like the lightbulb moments in a classroom, there are instances of happenstance where a clear exchange is evident between both cultures. However, can an environment be created where these exchanges are much more purposeful?

Similar to the Costa Rica course, Hautzinger (2008) required that students regularly reflect on their experience and complete a report on their work placement. In addition, she required two reciprocal assignments: "students would perform an immaterial gift exchange of some aspect of music, e.g., teaching 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and learning to sing something Brazilian, e.g., 'Parabens' (Happy Birthday) in return." Interestingly, similar exchanges occurred during the Costa Rica course. College students would teach English phrases or songs. Then the Costa Rican elementary students would often teach the same words or phrases in Spanish. The second reciprocal assignment was a "visual cultural offering" such as a collage of photos or drawings.

Two components separate community-based learning from volunteerism or community service: (1) reflection and (2) reciprocity (Brutin, 2003; Hammersley, 2013). The course outlined in this article incorporated both oral and written reflection. In both small and large group discussions, students had the opportunity to share their collective and unique experiences, challenges, and concerns. In their written journals, students responded to carefully framed questions that allowed for a more critical examination of their experiences. In addition, students submitted a written culminating report about their overall experience at the worksite.

The second component, reciprocity, is more difficult to determine. According to Hammersley (2013) "Reciprocity is commonly understood within the service-learning literature as the relationship between 'service providers' and 'service receivers' and the mutuality between their needs and outcomes" (p. 174). From a logistical standpoint, it is much easier to ascertain the outcomes received by the college students particularly since they share their experiences through both written and oral communication. However, how might community-based study abroad programs be more purposeful in determining and meeting the needs within the community? Does the community see our service as a benefit? If not, then the key component of reciprocity is missing. "Without the voices of community partners, research cannot sufficiently address 'how' the practice of service-learning results in mutually beneficial exchange" (Hammersley, 2013). Thus, working with the local community coordinator, there needs to be more clearly defined points of communication. For example, a short needs assessment survey should be sent to supervisors or teachers at the worksite. Then at the end of the trip, a follow-up discussion or survey is filled out to see if the needs of the community were met. To further improve future experiences, it is imperative to understand the perspective of each party involved.

Discussion

For future educators or college students in general without experience speaking Spanish, the course provided several challenges. First, students had to learn how to overcome the language barrier by learning other ways to communicate such as with hand gestures, pictures, or broken Spanish. When the Internet was available, they might use Google translator or an English to Spanish App. Second, the college students had to be willing to learn from the elementary students that they were teaching. Third, the college students had to be flexible! Costa Rican culture is different and time is more flexible. La hora tica or Tico time means that scheduled activities might not start on time because Costa Ricans have a more flexible notion of the importance of punctuality. Schedules often had to be adjusted. Sometimes this involved waiting a little longer for a ride or realizing that an activity might need to be adapted to meet the needs of the elementary students better. Fourth, as students gained an overall understanding of a different culture, they became more empathetic. They were experiencing what it was like to be the minority. Lastly, some college students experienced physical barriers through illness and overall fatigue. Their bodies had to become accustomed to the different foods and climate. Each of these challenges provided valuable experiences for future educators and college students in general who wanted to become more globally competent.

Professors and Community Partners

The Spanish professor is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Costa Rica, Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies, as well as the Chair of the Spanish program. She is actively engaged in study abroad, community-based learning and student internships. She regularly directs programs abroad in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico as well as for the Kentucky Institute for International Studies in Costa Rica. She worked closely with the Bonner Scholars program, a national organization that promotes and supports college student involvement in community service and social action, to supervise an After School Program for immigrant, migrant and first-generation K-12 students in Kentucky. She has written and received several grants to promote high-impact practices at her university.

The education professor has taught at the secondary and college levels for several years. She has worked with teachers and students as a K-12 mathematics resource coordinator and with the Appalachian Math and Science Partnership. This was the first trip in which the education professor traveled abroad with a group of students. Thus it provided an excellent opportunity for a more experienced faculty member to mentor a colleague in offering study abroad courses. She has worked with university students in various K-12 classroom settings. In preparing pre-service teachers for their role in the public schools, she has focused on the following knowledge base, and skill sets to name a few that would be imperative to this program: flexibility, problem-solving, decision making, planning, pedagogy, appropriate content delivery, etc. As an education professor, she has had the opportunity to collaborate with teachers from the surrounding school districts. This program extended that collaboration more globally. While many education candidates have gone abroad as students and even as teachers, this project would help to broaden the impact of the education program even further.

The in-country coordinator for 2010 was from Colorado, Corredores in Costa Rica. She organized the homestays and made the introductions at the La Palma School. She also worked with the local families to ask them if their children could participate in summer ESL classes. She

worked with the school board to get permission to give classes in the school during a break. She found a community member willing to work to make school lunches. Along with the school board, she decided what the immediate needs of the school were and sent the college a letter asking for material donations to patch a roof and renovate the gutter system for the La Palma school. She then purchased all of the materials and found local craftsmen who were willing to teach the U.S. college students how to do the work.

The La Palma School interim principal at the time opened many doors for the group, She asked for permission from the Ministry of Education for students to work in the La Palma School buildings. She sent home letters to the parents of all La Palma School elementary students letting them know that college students would teach English classes during the school's summer break. She hosted one of the professors on this trip in her home both in 2010 and 2011. For several years she has sacrificed her own vacation time to host U.S. college students, professors, and programs. The collaboration with this community contact, beginning in 2010, was one of the largest factors for successfully creating a sustainable learning environment for Kentucky students in La Palma, Costa Rica.

College Students

The students from Centre College in Kentucky had the opportunity to enroll in either an education or Spanish community-based, study abroad course to Costa Rica in January of 2010. The college has a long tradition of offering both semester-long and month-long study abroad experiences for its population, which at the time was approximately 1280 students. At the time of this course, community-based work offered through the college was primarily in the United States or Latin America. As leaders of the course, professors wanted to combine both high-impact practices for students.

The actual enrollment of the combined classes included twenty-five students, five males, and twenty females. Of the twenty-five students, ten were education students, and fifteen were Spanish students. All students were placed into collaborative groups that comprised both disciplines. In collaboration, education and Spanish-speaking college students taught basic English to a range of elementary grades. Although the ability to speak Spanish was not a prerequisite for the education course, students would participate in basic Spanish instruction in pre-course planning sessions. Through immersion into a different language and culture, education students experienced similar barriers and challenges in a school setting that many English Language Learners experience in United States schools today. To teach is to learn, however, and students emerged from this experience with an elevated sense of cultural competence in the classroom, with skills, expertise, and knowledge which would serve them well in a future of ever-changing populations of students. Many teachers in the United States today come from middle to upper-class backgrounds, with little to no experience living and learning in a culture which is different from their own. Students were asked to compare and contrast the learning environments of rural Costa Rica with those they have observed in rural Kentucky. Work began before the trip, as students gathered instructional supplies to take with them since supplies in the rural destination of Costa Rica were limited.

Course Framework

The model proposed in this article is from the perspective of two professors in the fields of education and Spanish. Abroad or on campus, educators develop specific objectives to maintain the direction and focus of a course. The objectives for the students were as follows:

- Research and examine specific teaching strategies and techniques.
- Develop appropriate lessons for each teaching day.
- Implement instruction in a rural Costa Rica.
- Collaborate with peers and teachers from another culture.
- Reflect analytically about an immersion experience.
- Examine the level of emphasis on environmental education within the school and community.
- Analyze readings related to community-based experience.
- Participate in group discussions.
- Participate in pre-course planning sessions.
- Work full days in the rural community.
- Submit service reports due for all work days
- Teach a lesson that will be evaluated.
- Complete a reading exam over assigned material.
- Write an environmental education paper of 4-6 pages.

Both education and Spanish students were evaluated on the following assignments:

- Personal photo album/scrapbook (5%)
 - Students prepared books about themselves to present to their host families. Scrapbooks included pictures and information to help the host family gain a better understanding of students and where they are from. Information was given in both English and Spanish.
- Formal lesson plans (10%)
 - Students worked in groups to prepare lessons for each teaching day. Resources were available in the college library for pre-course planning. It was imperative that groups be prepared with all the necessary materials needed for each lesson. Groups were given a template to help guide their lesson plan development. Each group needed to be prepared for 11 teaching days.
- Instruction in the schools (15%)
 - Groups carried out their formal lesson plans making appropriate adjustments when necessary. All group members even those with limited Spanish were expected to take part in working with the Costa Rican children.
- Culminating activity at each site (5%)
 - College students collaborated to present a final event or product at each site. Suggested activities/projects were the following but not limited to this list: books created with the students, a musical production, or a dramatic production. Students were asked to turn in an outline or brief description of what their activity would entail and the role of each individual in the project.
- Journal entries and service report (25%)
 - Students reflected in a journal collected weekly. In the journal entries students reported their work, described emotional reactions to their experience and discussed challenges or concerns. Students answered very specific journal questions each day. Questions were posted on an assignment sheet.
- Final service report (15%)
 - Students wrote a final report about their contributions to the worksite. They described what it was like to be immersed in another culture, and analyzed how

the experience might prepare them as future teachers. They explained what strategies they learned to help them communicate effectively.

- Environmental education paper (15%)
 - Students wrote 4-6 page papers analyzing one of the aspects presented in an assigned article on environmental education. They described how they might apply what they learned about environmental education to their lives in the United States.
- Reading exam (10%)
 - Students were given a selection of reading assignments that focused on the Costa Rican educational system, working with English language learners, and environmental education.

Pre-departure Meetings

During the fall of 2009, students participated in three pre-departure meetings in preparation for this trip. Because of the cultural differences, one overall focus of the meetings was to establish a community of learners prepared for working in rural Costa Rican schools. Part of this orientation discussed specific lifestyle differences of the area where students would live in part provided very practical lessons on daily living as well as health and safety issues. The first meeting consisted of introductions, logistics, and presentation of a class Google Site. The Google Site was used for posting information such as the following: resources, helpful links, groups, meeting agendas, packing list, lesson plans, and a travel itinerary. Meetings were held in the library computer lab to allow for easy access to the Google Site and online resources.

Another major focus of the orientation was on developing a group dynamic that was important for traveling on a small bus together. Before the second training students were required to prepare and submit ESL or math lesson plans. During this part of the orientation period students had the opportunity to discuss their sample lessons for feedback.

The second meeting involved planning whole group, community activities, and possible on-going projects with the children. Some suggestions included making a book project, teaching arts and crafts, dance, sports and/or having a community performance. Students were asked to bring ideas from camps and after-school programs. In addition, students were encouraged to consider how they might incorporate their personal talents. Each large group, consisting of smaller teaching groups, was asked to submit ideas before December 1st.

The third and final pre-departure meeting took place the first week in December. Prior to this meeting, students attended a college-wide general study abroad trip meeting. The individual group meeting started with a warm-up activity to further emphasize the importance of building community relationships within the group. Items discussed included the following:

- Discuss the final itinerary with the map.
- Read the packing list together.
- Talk about etiquette in the homes including food etiquette.
- Present your best lesson ideas.
- Talk about a plan for assessment of your students' progress
- Distribute readings.
- Distribute materials for houses and schools.

Arrival and Location

Students were placed in the La Palma School in Costa Rica in 2010. The primary school had an enrollment of 60-65 students grades preschool through sixth grade. The students in this school study in multi-grade classrooms. The La Palma School at the time had three classrooms. Each room had one classroom teacher that taught language, math, social studies, and science. In 2010, classes at the school were held in two sessions. There were students that only came in the morning and students that only came in the afternoon. Each group came to class for about four hours a day. A meal was provided for each student either before classes for the afternoon students or after classes for the morning students. When students visited the La Palma in January the school was on summer vacation.

Students learned about the school and the elementary school students before arrival to Costa Rica. A year prior, schools were asked what kinds of activities they would like the U.S. college students to implement. The school administrators, teachers and members of the parent committee informed us that they would like students to give English classes and also help community members with a few specific projects at the school. This invitation was very important in shaping classes and orientations for the students. The students were aware from a very early stage that they were invited by the small community of La Palma. Another important part of the collaboration with La Palma was that students were living in homestays with the families who sent their students to the school as well as many of the children in the school. Collaboration between this university and La Palma began in 2006 when the Spanish professor, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer who did her work in this town, took a group of university students to the town for a four-day visit. La Palma still requests and receives students as interns to date.

In-Country Reflection

Throughout the time in Costa Rica, reflection was an important aspect of the overall experience. Below is an outline of the reflection questions used to promote discussion in class and to assess student progress.

Journal Entries: Each of the journals entries was organized like this:

- A. Time/ Date
- B. A bulleted list of what the students did in the class they taught and a follow-up list of what they planned to do the next day.
- C. The answer to the reflection prompt listed below.

Journal Entry 1:

Letter to self: fold it over and staple it. You will open it at the end of the term.

What challenges do you expect as an American educator in Costa Rica? What do you hope to contribute to the community while in Costa Rica? What stereotypes or prejudiced perspectives do you feel you had coming to Costa Rica?

What questions might you ask while immersed in a rural Spanish speaking community? What data might be feasible to collect? What might be the ethical issues involved in your work in the community? What precautions might you take to prevent ethical problems from occurring in your assignment?

Journal Entry 2: As a community service provider, you play a different role than you do as a university student. Describe this new role. What specific tasks and behaviors are expected of you? What obligations and rights do you have as a result of being in this role? Compare this new role with your role as student. Are you experiencing any strain, conflict or distancing?

Journal Entry 3:

Setting: What are your most vivid first impressions of the school? Describe settings, people, actions and positive or negative feelings you are having.

Inventory: Develop an inventory for the community being served regarding education and in particular, the problem you are addressing or work you are doing. What are the resources? Who are the local leaders? What roles to certain organizations play? What relationships exist? What other work has been done? What are the various attitudes about the project? What are the challenges? Where are they? Describe the school system and the school. Have you met teachers? What do you know about the Education system in Costa Rica so far? Are there people you have met that go to middle or high school? How do they get there?

Journal Entry 4: List data that you have collected. What students have you worked with (use first names)? What material did you cover? What techniques or modifications worked best for these students? How would you describe the students' learning styles? Did you make adjustments to your lesson plans based on student learning? How did you address any misconceptions that you had before beginning this project? What changes do you plan to make next week? Describe one specific instance in the classroom that you would describe as a successful teaching moment.

Journal Entry 5: Interview your housemates. Talk to each other about service experience and time in the homestay, take notes, and summarize their experiences. Ask them about their experience with language and culture both at home and at work. If they have limited experience with the Spanish language what are new ways they have learned to communicate? If they are a student that speaks more Spanish have them describe their role as interpreter. Ask them about their experience with food and culture. What has been surprising to them? Do they have advice for other students in the group?

Journal Entry 6: How do you think your presence in the community impacts the people (students and others in the community) with whom you work? What impact has this assignment had on you? Illustrate your points with specific experiences you have had this term.

Journal Entry 7: Identify a person that you got to know this term who is significantly different from you. What are the needs or challenges facing them? What is one way in

which you've allowed yourself to be changed as a result of knowing this person? How do you think knowing this person will impact you beyond the time you spend in Costa Rica?

Journal Entry 8: Have you ever felt hopelessness, despair, discouragement or burnout related to your work? How have you dealt with this? How can reflection help? What are some of the problems facing the world today? How does your service connect or address these issues?

Journal Entry 9: List data that you have collected. Who did you work with? What did you cover? What techniques or modifications worked best for these students? Did you make adjustments to your teaching based on results of assessment? How did you address any misconceptions that you had before beginning this project? What changes would you recommend for future groups?

Journal Entry 10:

- What have you learned about yourself?
- What have you learned about your community at home and here?
- What have you contributed to the community site?
- What values, opinions, beliefs have changed?
- What was the most important lesson learned
- How have you been challenged?
- What should others do about this issue?
- What impact did you have on the community?
- Describe what you have learned about yourself as a student, as a teacher/educator, and as a person.
- Describe one experience/situation while in Costa Rica that you never imagined you would have.

Journal Entry 11: Open the letter you wrote to yourself at the beginning of last week. Are you able to answer any of the questions you had in the first letter? What perceptions you had at the outset have changed?

The students and professors used the journal entries regularly to reflect on their experiences. One of the main goals professors had when assigning the journal entries was to have focus on the students they were teaching and then adapt the lessons they had planned while still in Kentucky to the actual students in La Palma. However, early on in the reflection process the professors realized that student writing and class discussion dealt more with what was happening in the homes and in the community than with what they were doing in the classrooms in La Palma.

The students were all staying in rural homes in two small towns. Each town has between 50-60 houses and nearly all of the families are palm farm workers. The nearest city of about 10,000 people is about 30 minutes away and public transportation is only available about once a day sometimes less. The students had to learn simple things in the homes such as that it was necessary to greet their family whenever they came home and that they needed to tell the homestay mother where they were going when they left and when they were coming back.

Professors learned how to guide students in the subsequent trips but during this first class students and faculty learned together. Students had to learn to be more respectful of the use of the home's resources. The families in rural Costa Rica use a lot less electricity and water than U.S. students were used to using. Another big adjustment was to the food as a typical day of meals in La Palma would consist of Gallo Pinto (rice and beans) with egg for breakfast, rice and beans and chicken for lunch, and something similar for dinner. Students wrote in their journals about the difference in schedules. As all students were staying in an agricultural town where most families get up at or before sunrise at 5:00 a.m. and go to bed around 8:00 p.m., students had to adjust to the idea that they would not have internet in any of the homes and that there was limited phone signal in most houses. At the time there were not landlines in La Palma, most people did not have cell phones, and not one house had internet. Things changed quickly after 2010 and so students in subsequent programs had fewer challenges related to phone and internet connections.

Some of the cultural differences that students learned were related to gender roles and expectations. While gender roles were starting to change in rural Costa Rica in 2010, there was still a mother in each of the homes that housed students and she stayed home all day caring for her children, cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry. Class discussions frequently centered on gender roles in class because the students for the most part had never lived in a household with such clear divisions of labor by gender. In their journals students wrote about how they were much more conscious of their bodies, voices and presence in the spaces of the home and schools. For instance, since they were mostly language learners they learned the importance of nonverbal communication. Students were asked not to slam doors, yell from one room to another or to grimace when they were confused. It was clear to this group that they were in an academic program but they certainly would not have been able to make the progress they did without all of the pre-departure meetings. While they were comfortable in homestays or in community activities they had little time to plan, write, or study because they were trying to learn about their homestay family, practice Spanish and learn about the culture of rural Costa Rica.

Some of the more challenging cultural lessons came from miscommunications and the reputation of U.S. students in this town. In 2010, La Palma had little experience with students from outside of the community. So these college students were setting a precedent for future students. Originally, it was a lot more difficult to place male students in homestays than female students because many families had preconceived notions about the male students. In particular, they were worried that they would abuse alcohol in a town where there was very limited alcohol use.

Students had to learn to be very careful about being alone with homestay family members of the opposite sex. Professors had to explicitly warn against this as the homestay coordinator requested monitoring of this kind of fraternization in order to protect the reputation of the family in the community. None of these were lessons that were planned or assessed as part of their classes but they were all important to the students' formation as citizens.

Through the 2010 group, professors learned how to help protect the health of the students in a rural tropical setting. However the health of the students and the professors is still an ongoing challenge while working in rural Costa Rica. Students are susceptible in this region to mosquito and waterborne illnesses. Students all slept under mosquito nets and drank only bottled water. While the area has now made significant progress through the Costa Rican Water and Sanitation Institute (AyA), which is a public institution reporting to the Ministry of Health, in granting more access to potable water, at the time all homes used well water. The situation with

mosquito-borne diseases has not improved but in fact the region now has the added threats of zika and chikungunya as well as dengue, which has been present in the region for decades.

One of the best parts of this work was that, the coordinator found community-based projects in both of the homestay towns for students. The students really enjoyed being able to work with school children on something the town actually wanted. Several students really made long-lasting connections with their homestay families as they are still interacting today. Many students made real efforts to learn the language and that went a long way to helping them feel connected in their homes and the communities.

After returning from Costa Rica in 2010, professors did not follow up with the students as part of the class. Both professors have taken classes abroad to learn from teachers and administrators in schools since this initial collaboration and now understand the importance of follow-up. Students that work in engaged learning projects such as this benefit more when they are asked to reflect upon their experiences after returning home and even much later when they have had a chance to understand the experience's long-term impact on their learning and lives. Students did reflect on their experiences during the entire time they were in Costa Rica. On the other hand, follow up has taken place with the school administrators, teachers and students in the placement area. The La Palma school has asked students to return nearly every year since 2010 and a good relationship has been maintained with the school and the teachers.

Results

In the 2012 version of this program on the second to last day of classes in La Palma School, the interim principal of the school, arranged a day-long meeting with the teachers and the assistant superintendent. Academically, this was the highlight of the trip for the class. The teachers had already observed classes in La Paz de San Ramon, taught classes in homes at night, taught an ESL camp and observed in rural schools in La Palma. They had many questions about the education system and about individual schools. The teachers, principal and the administrator were all so open and willing to answer questions. The Costa Rican educators even asked many questions about the way things work in the U.S. It was a great exchange of ideas and it came at the perfect time during the course. This has now become a model for engagement in rural community schools. Students now learn from the Costa Rican teachers, collaborate, ask questions and share ideas. In 2010, a great deal of time and energy was spent in the community doing direct service. For instance, students and faculty painted a school in Drake Bay and helped fix the gutters on the La Palma School. In subsequent programs, an emphasis has been placed on understanding the education system and making stronger connections with the teachers and administrators.

One of the main results of the connection established with the La Palma School in 2010 is that collaboration continues on a regular basis through sending interns and volunteers that go to learn from and assist the classroom teachers there. Interns are invited to La Palma and other schools nearby for a four-week period. One of the trip leaders also repeated this trip in 2012. The 2010, classes were also the basis for the development of the Kentucky Institute for International Studies, Costa Rica program classes from 2012-2016. The KIIS classes were originally held in La Palma School and had a very similar format to the 2010 classes. The KIIS students worked in the regular classrooms observing, helping with grading English homework and eventually developing and implementing their own lessons in most cases. Implementation of what was learned from this experience has been applied to the Merida internships at schools such as Escuela Manuel Cepeda Peraza, Merida and Costa Rica internships in Barrio San Jorge, Paso

Canoas, Las Veguitas, Corredores, and León Cortés Castro in San Marcos. Collaborations have been established with the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje in San Pablo and San Marcos in the Los Santos region of Costa Rica for the past two years that uses the format developed in the years since 2010. Initially students would go to a community and teach English to elementary school children during the holiday break. The preference now is to be invited into classrooms to work with teachers. Thus the U.S. college students spend time learning and observing first, assisting in ways that the teacher asks, reflecting and adapting constantly, and working with the teachers for the benefit of both sets of students.

The ultimate framework for the course has been molded to meet the various geographic locations. Each offering of the course has had its own unique challenges and areas for improvement. In Costa Rica, one challenge was encouraging local students to come to school during their normal break. The college academic calendar does not always coincide with those in other countries. Thus, the community must be convinced that what the community-based study abroad program has to offer is of benefit to their elementary students. When the college returned to Costa Rica in January, 2012 the college students taught in three different schools in the region near La Palma. This was challenging but fortunately, there were two professors on the trip to distribute the supervision of students.

When the college taught a community-based study abroad course in Ghana, all students were teaching within a close proximity of one another since the rural school went from kindergarten through eighth grade. However, the major challenge at this location was brought on by miscommunication. When the college students arrived at the school where they were planning to observe and assist, many of the local teachers left their classrooms. Fortunately, the college students stepped up to the challenge and worked well with the local students. However, there was not an exchange of ideas between the students and local teachers, which was a lost opportunity on both accounts.

Conclusion

The college continues to teach community-based education and Spanish classes abroad including recent courses in Mexico and Costa Rica. These new courses closely meet the ideals of the professors. In the most recent education course, taught in Mexico in 2015, students still had to make adjustments to their planned lessons/activities but there is a more collaborative effort between the college students and local teachers. The local teachers work with the college students so that they can be more or less involved in the overall instruction depending on their comfort level. Students and the professor received positive oral feedback from community partners. In the future, more of an effort will be made to systematically record this feedback in order to analyze the perspectives of the local educators and build sustainable relationships. In addition, as mentioned by Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012), students need ample time to reflect and process their experiences. Sometimes this processing goes beyond the course itself. Thus, asking students to reflect a year or more after the experience might provide new insights and perspectives on their overall experience.

The community-based Spanish and education collaboration abroad in 2010 was the basis for many more classes like it in the years that followed. The professors have now adapted their methodologies by focusing more on the importance of the community providers, gathering student and community partner reflections after each course ends, and helping students process cultural aspects of the worksites as part of their academic experience. Community-based study abroad classes like the one developed in La Palma in 2010 provide students with real

opportunities and challenges that ferment their growth as students. The college students have all taken steps to understand the basic principles that bind them together as members of the same human family.

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