Community Field Experience Fosters Relationships and Personal Growth

Michelle B. Pierce PhD, RD1, Vanessa Sawyer MS, RD2, Ann M. Ferris PhD, RD1, 3
1Department of Medicine, Division of Public Health and Population Sciences, University of Connecticut Health Center 
2Department of Nutritional Sciences, University of Connecticut, Storrs

Abstract

Objective

To assess outcomes from a first-time service-learning course promoting leadership, cultural competence, and civic responsibility.

Methods

Recruitment

Students who previously participated in two prior service-learning courses.

Course responsibilities

- Readings: focusing on childhood overweight and the influence of poverty and culture on health behaviors
- Curricular Development: targeting healthy behaviors and physical activity
- Community Service: implementation of curricular content in a school after-school program
- Class Discussions and Reflections: an ongoing feedback process

Pre and post-Analysis

- Quantitative: Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory
- Qualitative: Interviews with students and service recipients, and a final exit interview

Background

- The U.S. population continues to increase in cultural diversity.
- Half of the students are non-Hispanic white; half are Hispanic or other racial/ethnic minority.
- Experiences in school settings can shape students' perspectives on cultural sensitivity and leadership.

Community Service – implementation of curricular content in a school after-school program

Leadership:

- Adaptability
- Reactivity

Cultural Competence - Microcultures

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Family

Success

Community Partner STAFF

Children

Lessons Learned

1. Over the summer, students developed trust and interact between team members, which increased their collaborative leadership skills and enhanced effectiveness in teams.
2. Interactions with the after-school children improved students' sensitivity to cultural differences and the need for culturally competent health educators.
3. Students' confidence and leadership skills increased when community staff recognized and valued their efforts.
4. Outcomes from a service-learning experience are enhanced if the experience is structured to build relationships between students and service recipients and community partners.

Results

Adaptability within Team

- Sample (n=20: 16 female, 4 male)
- 24 ages 19-22 years
- 23 female
- 14 English
- 13 science
- 15 social studies

Cultural Competence with Children

- 3.8
- 4.0
- 4.2

Cultural Competence with Staff

- 3.8
- 4.0
- 4.2

Success: Child Receptivity and Positive Feedback

- 3.8
- 4.0
- 4.2

Reactivity within Team

- 3.8
- 4.0
- 4.2

Green Cultural Competence Inventory Results: 2013-2014

B. Community service projects provide ongoing opportunities for enhancement of personal leadership skills and development of intercultural relationships.

C. Community service projects help students foster skills to lead and manage small and large teams.

D. Community service projects help students develop skills to resolve conflicts and mediate issues.

E. Community service projects help students develop skills to evaluate outcomes and effect change.

F. Community service projects help students develop skills to initiate and maintain relationships on an intercultural level.

G. Community service projects help students develop skills to interpret and respond to information from diverse cultures.

H. Community service projects help students develop skills to identify and resolve problems on an intercultural level.

I. Community service projects help students develop skills to foster cultural competence in others on an intercultural level.

J. Community service projects help students develop skills to foster cultural competence in themselves on an intercultural level.