

Field Experience

A Hands-on Approach to Multicultural Education

By William W. Davidson

Experience is a great teacher, we are told, but it cannot be taught. Experience may be shared, however, and is an important part of meaningful learning. A discipline in which experience is not beneficial is difficult to imagine. In most disciplines practical application is absolutely essential. Co-op and on-the-job training programs are a direct response to the demand of prospective employers. In addition to inquiries about the courses a student has taken, job interviews invariably include the question, "What experience have you had?"

What value can experience provide in building Christ-centered multicultural awareness? Or is such an awareness needed? If multicultural awareness is desirable, how may it best be structured in an academic setting within the Seventh-day Adventist educational system?

Answers to these questions must be framed in terms of objectives. All SDA schools are philosophically committed to implementing a balanced educational program. Most schools have a definite "Statement of Mission," usually similar to the one at Andrews University, which states that the distinguishing marks envisioned by its founders—which still guide the university—include "(1) An educational program that is balanced in the development of the Spiritual, Mental, Physical, and Social life of the student. (2) Programs which encourage Christ-centered service to humanity."

How can we design a program that fills these objectives? It is obvious that multicultural awareness is an imperative when we examine the composition of the student bodies of our colleges. Many American SDA college campuses have a

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cultural mix not unlike that at Andrews: In the 1986-1987 school year almost half of the students on Andrews University's campus were not white Americans.

Our commitment to social development and service to humanity demands a continuing emphasis on multicultural awareness if we are to accept the Master's assignment to go "to all the world." However, in light of the high percentage of multiethnic students on Adventist campuses, such awareness must begin within our own organizations.

Developing Awareness

Most of us have seen situations in which common sense judgment based on multicultural awareness was obviously lacking. Here are a few examples:

- A young faithful and conscientious Christian family with young children accept a call to serve in a foreign mission post. They have never been outside the U.S. but are willing to sacrifice their time and money for service. They attend a mission institute and study hard. They leave the U.S. with enthusiasm, only to return six months later discouraged and frustrated.
- We make friends with a fellow worker in a foreign country or one who has just arrived in the U.S. He unquestionably considers himself an "authority" on North American culture; we feel at a loss to know how to be honest with him and still preserve our friendship.
- An American teacher is invited to dinner at the home of a friend in a

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Integrating Study and Experience

But is experience alone the solution to these problems? Definitely not. By itself, experience may be inefficient, frustrating, and even dangerous. A Christ-centered approach to multicultural awareness must include both study and experience. It should integrate the spiritual, mental, physical, and social facets of culture into the total person.

However, one fundamental aspect of experience is neither conveniently taught nor gained through field education. Attitude, that crucial but elusive component, must form the core of our "Hidden Curriculum." In solving this problem we can learn from Jesus, who had major difficulties with His students' attitudes. His disciples suffered from very pronounced blind spots in their multicultural awareness. His approach was not to "Develop a course" or to "Find 12 co-op slots," but by personal example to convincingly demonstrate the welcoming attitudes of His kingdom.

Opportunities for Learning About Other Cultures

How can the experimental component of multicultural awareness best be accomplished? Four options come readily to mind: travelling as a tourist, studying abroad, serving as a student missionary, and working as a Maranatha-type volunteer. Each option provides both advantages and limitations. Furthermore, we must consider the opportunities not only in terms of cultural awareness but also in relation to spiritual, mental, physical, and social development and service.

In this context, the tourist experience is incomplete. At best it is an unnatural cultural contact. At worst it becomes a financial "fleecing."

The "student abroad" program has proven valuable to many participants. It has the advantage of being well-structured and offering exchange credits. It may, however, tend to limit the student's experiences to a narrow portion of

foreign country. The friend's wife is also the high school English teacher. Her food is excellent but her English just isn't comprehensible. Attempts at communication result in embarrassment for everyone.

- While visiting overseas I am introduced to a conference official who is incensed that I cannot understand him. I am informed that he has a Master's degree in English.
- A group of U.S. volunteers struggle to complete a small church building in a foreign country. The local members are eager to make friends and work with

the group. As pressure mounts to complete the project within the two-week deadline, some of the skilled craftsmen become impatient with the locals who "can't understand common language," and have different work habits. Words like *dummy* are hurled about. The English may not be understood but the tone of voice is, resulting in an unpleasant experience for everyone.

Is it possible that field education experience could contribute to a better understanding or a more acceptable solution to such problems? Emphatically, yes!

the culture. Obviously, the program emphasis is largely academically oriented.

As student missionaries, many young adults have broadened their multicultural awareness and been involved in first-hand service to humanity. It would be ideal if every college student could participate in such an experience. The program, however, must be selective. In addition, a full year is a difficult time commitment, and financing may present insurmountable problems. And for many students, experiencing culture shock for the first time, a full year proves to be too long.

A carefully structured orientation conducted by well-adjusted persons who have had successful experience in the

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culture(s) involved can prove most valuable as a training tool. Such an orientation could prevent unhappy and unfortunate experiences later.

No one program is best for everyone, but every student deserves the opportunity to participate in a variety of experiences that will foster awareness and insights for service.

The timing of a multicultural experience as part of the overall education is crucial. The best time is just before the senior year of college. By then the student should have achieved some maturity, but will still be in a "learning mode." After graduation many feel they are "supposed to know" everything, and are less open to new experiences.

For the past 20 years, Maranatha Flights International has offered short term (about two weeks) opportunities for individuals to become part of a service-oriented volunteer construction team. In the past few years, this program has included not only increasing numbers of youth (approximately 1,000 participated during the 1987-1988 school year), but also groups from all over the U.S. and Canada.

There are disadvantages to such a brief exposure. A two-week Maranatha trip, to the average student, seems to be like a bucket of cold water in the face on a lazy summer afternoon. Its full benefit will become apparent only after enough time has elapsed for study, reflection, and sharing.

Brief programs do provide certain

advantages for future longer-term service planning. For example, many student missionaries first become excited about service on an M.F.I. project. Unfortunately, others, like a seminary student, who work very well on a project for two weeks, honestly state, "I'm glad I came, but now I know I can't accept a call to the mission field."

A construction project provides one advantage that is lacking in a cultural experience consisting only of scholastic, religious, or social activities. Working together at hard physical labor creates a unique environment in which to build cross-cultural bonds. Facades disappear, true personalities quickly surface, and, if participants are willing to learn and adapt, the spiritual, mental, and social components of relationships begin to come into perspective.

The potential benefits for a youth group may be best understood by studying a typical example. A group of students volunteered to help build a church in a Latin American ghetto. Open sewers, unpaved streets, green scummy ponds, and trash and garbage were part of the everyday life of the residents.

It was interesting to watch the young volunteers, who came from a beautiful academy in the U.S., as they "settled in." In the beginning the big questions being asked were "Will the electricity here hurt my hair dryer?" and "Where can I hang my designer clothes?" It soon became apparent that a few of those who had volunteered to "work for the Lord" were so hostile that they wouldn't even speak to some of the other students.

Things soon began to change. The communication problem vanished when the students encountered problems relating to necessities like food, water, bed, shower, concrete block, and mortar. A beautiful thing began to happen. The local church members working on the project graciously took the students into their lives, their homes, and their hearts. They shared the only things they had—friendship and love—as they demonstrated that "things" are not the source of happiness.

A transformed group returned home. Hair dryers had nearly been forgotten. Nonessential clothing (designer and all) were eagerly given to desperately needy friends. The students were now a closely knit team filled with the joy of service for Christ.

To illustrate a broader and more balanced Maranatha-type program the following example is excerpted from the 1983 Annual Conference Proceedings of the American Society for Engineering Education.²

The Panama Experience

In January of 1980, 51 Andrews Univer-

sity students traveled to Chiriqui, Panama, to spend the winter quarter studying, working, and living in a foreign society. The group consisted of 19 women and 32 men. None was a graduating senior; only a few were first-year freshmen. Most were in the late sophomore to early junior category. Students were classified according to academic interest or declared majors as follows:

Engineering, Computer or Technology.....	10
Liberal Arts	8
Architecture	7
Education	6
Social Work	4
Business	3
Math and Science	3
Nursing	3
Home Economics	2
Undecided	5

Staffing for the venture included seven Americans and three Panamanians. Their academic backgrounds included B.S. degrees in education, engineering and history, M.S. degrees in biology, physics, and religion, and a Ph.D. in engineering. Certificates included a licensed building contractor, master electrician, master plumber, registered nurse, and professional engineer. Four of the staff were vocationally qualified for teaching in the areas of auto mechanics, carpentry,

masonry, plumbing, and electrical wiring.

A budget was constructed around the regular tuition room-and-board package for undergraduate students at Andrews University. Each student paid the same fee as a full-time dormitory student on campus. All of their expenses were covered for transportation, food, housing, insurance, etc. for the program. Those who returned to Andrews University as full-time students in the spring quarter received a \$250 scholarship. Special features covered by the package included several group trips to the ocean beaches and the mountains, a visit to the Panama Canal, and a long weekend in San Jose, Costa Rica. Of the seven American staff, four were on Andrews University salary, and three were volunteers with expenses paid. The three Panamanian staff were not funded from this budget.

The host organization, Institute Adventista Panameno, a small boarding school near La Concepcion, provided housing, cafeteria facilities, and classrooms. Since it was their summer vacation, the regular school program was not in progress, permitting more flexibility.

To provide a balance of mental, physical, and social activity for the group was the goal of program planning. The central focus was the construction of a new men's dormitory (now housing 90 stu-

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munication occurring between native speakers—including yourself—and the ESL students. Negative nonverbal communication can cause irreparable damage. For example, your words may tell the student that you care about him or her, but your actions subtly hinder learning, especially if your requests violate cultural prohibitions in the child's primary language.

Conclusion

Teachers must take the time to gain the necessary knowledge to meet the needs of ESL students who are mainstreamed in their classes. If teachers are flexible and empathetic, helping students learn a new language can be an exhilarating and rewarding experience for everyone concerned. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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² While principles of a second language learning apply in a variety of cultures, we will focus attention in this article on English as a second language.

³ Mary Finnocchiaro, "Motivation: Its Crucial Role in Language Learning," Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Detroit, Michigan, March 3-8, 1981). In *TESOL '81*.

⁴ Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, "A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence," in *The Construct Validation of Tests of Communicative Competence*, 1981. Includes proceedings of a colloquium at TESOL (Boston, Mass., February 27-28, 1979).

⁵ Judy P. Donaldson, *Transcultural Picture Word List: for Teaching English to Children From Any of 21 Language Backgrounds* (Holmes Beach, Fla.: Learning Publications, Inc., 1980).

⁶ Sharon L. Pugh and James Fenelon, "Integrating Learning, Language, and Intercultural Skills for International Students," *Journal of Reading*, 31:4 (January 1988), pp. 310-320.

⁷ Aaron Wolfgang, ed., *Nonverbal Behavior: Perspectives, Applications, Intercultural Insights* (Lewiston, N.Y.: C. J. Hogrefe, Inc., 1984).

⁸ Thomas H. Geno, "Common American Attitudes That Help and Hinder in Communicating in a Foreign Culture," ACTFL Master Lecture Series, 24 pp. Paper presented at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Presidio of Monterey, Calif., June 1982.

⁹ Wilga Rivers, *Communicating Naturally in a Second Language: Theory and Practice in Classroom Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Muriel Troike-Saville, *Foundations for Teaching English as a Second Language: Theory and Method for Multicultural Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976); Audrey L. Wright, "Initial Techniques in Teaching English as a Second Language," in Kenneth Croft, ed., *Readings on English as a Second Language for Teachers and Teacher-Trainees* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1972).

¹⁰ George Yule, "The Excommunicative Approach (and How to Avoid It)," *Minnesota TESOL Journal*, 4 (Fall 1984), pp. 23-42.

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dents), planned and sponsored by Maranatha Flights International, a Christian "peace corps." Students (except for those on K.P.) and staff (usually four or five) worked together doing design and construction on the project each morning from 7:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. After a two-hour lunch and siesta, classes were held from 1:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. This work-study program operated on a five-day week.

Regular classes were offered in conversational Spanish (three sections), Latin American cultural perspectives, Panamanian history, religion, mathematics, physics, wood framing, masonry, plumbing, and electrical wiring. In addition, a number of students did special course work under independent study. All were required to register for 12 credits; most took 16. Only three of the total group could not work out a program totally applicable to their degree goal.

Weekends provided opportunity for travel and social interaction in Panamanian society. About two dozen regular students from the school were on campus and worked together as a part of the team. A few "sat in" on some classes. The study schedule precluded extensive social activity during the week, but in keeping with what seems to be "standard practice," most students were careful not to allow their studies to interfere with their "education."

In Retrospect

Of the 51 students who participated in the Panama "experiment," not one has suggested that he or she wishes he had not gone. Most have said that it was the best educational experience of their lives. Of course, with time, less pleasant experiences dim.

From a teacher's point of view, the experience was uniquely rewarding. Believe it or not—they're all still my friends. Interested in role modeling? There is no better opportunity. But be advised—there can be no facade. There is no place to hide!

But where in such a program is the educational aspect? Where are the humanities? What part taught the social sciences? Was it the visit to the rodeo, the local church, the banana plantation? Do the humanities encompass learning to

live in a dormitory (nicknamed "la hotel de cucarachas") with three-inch cockroaches? Or is there a social science involved in attending to a plugged-up "john" that mountain students have stood on and continued to use, though non-functional, to the point of becoming a "barnyard mound"—because they were determined to do their very best to please and to adapt to the new ways?

In retrospect, several facets of the Panama project stand out:

1. Students learned the culture by living in it.
2. Students struggled for the survival of their own group society and learned to "make it work" by living cooperatively with their peers (both U.S. and foreign).
3. Students learned the value of innovation and adaptation, both on the job and socially, to achieve a common goal.

In Conclusion

At a certain point in the development of most normal students they are adventurous, flexible, sufficiently mature, and anxious to "do something". This is the opportune time to "plug-in" to international work-study.

The Maranatha experience has changed the lives of many students. It deserves wider implementation. If we are really concerned about role models for students, shouldn't we do more than just "tell" them? Shouldn't we "show" them? Better yet, we can send, or even take them, as we share together marvelous opportunities for fellowship and cultural awareness. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ 47.7 percent as reported by the self-study for North Central Association reaccreditation.

² Adapted from William W. Davidson, "International Work-Study: A Possible Solution to the Humanities/Social Science Requirement," from *Engineering—Images for the Future*, Lawrence P. Grayson and Joseph M. Biedenbach, eds. (Proceedings of the 1983 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference, Rochester Institute of Technology, June 19-23, 1983, pp. 99-101.) Reprinted with permission from the Proceedings of the 1983 Annual Conference of the American Society for Engineering Education.