

FULFILLING A NEED FOR TEACHERS IN CAMBODIA: DEFIANCE COLLEGE STUDENTS DEVELOP LESSON PLANS TO BE USED AS TRAINING MATERIALS

Fred Coulter, Ph.D., McMaster Associate Fellow

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge seized control of Cambodia and the ensuing genocide left more than one million people dead. In addition, untold numbers of books and other written materials were destroyed. Since 1980, Cambodia has been working to rebuild its educational system. Though it has been rebuilding schools and training teachers, written educational materials are not readily available. During a previous trip to Phnom Penh, teachers told McMaster Fellow Dr. Jo Ann Burkhardt that they needed educational materials written in Khmer, their native language. To fulfill this need, Dr. Burkhardt asked a class of early childhood education students enrolled in a course on assessment to develop lesson plans that could be translated into Khmer, copied, and used as part of a teacher training project in Cambodia.

The students in my educational psychology course readily agreed and began the task of writing lesson plans and summarizing concepts from the course. However, before the students could write the lesson plans, they had to immerse themselves in Cambodian culture. Very quickly, the students realized that the educational environment in Cambodia was quite different from that in Northwest Ohio. They discovered that teachers in Cambodia had very limited resources. There were no copy machines or smart boards. Teachers had the basics--classrooms, desks set in rows, chalkboards, blank booklets for the students, and pencils. They realized that the task of writing the lesson plans was not as simple as taking lesson plans they had written for other courses and having them translated into Khmer. They needed to understand as best they could what it meant to be a teacher and a student in Cambodia.

With the help of Dr. Burkhardt's guest lectures, students in the educational psychology course were able to deepen their understanding of Cambodian culture. They wrote brief papers imagining the learning environment in Cambodia. These reflections helped them in the development of culturally appropriate lesson plans and summaries of theories on cognition, which took place in three phases. First, the students researched teaching methods appropriate to the Cambodian learning environment. Second, they wrote lesson plans in the content areas of math, geography, and science using a template of the selected teaching method. Third, they briefly summarized concepts from educational psychology, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

After researching and discussing the best teaching methods, the Defiance College students selected direct instruction; a method of teaching that is very explicit. Instructors clearly explain to students what they are going to learn, demonstrate the skill to be learned during the lesson, have students practice the skill, and assess students' learning of the skill (Flores & Kaylor, 2007; Kim & Axelrod, 2005; Rittle-Johnson, 2006). As part of the teacher training materials, a group of students in the class wrote an explanation of direct instruction and how to implement each step of the template. The six steps of the direct instruction template were: 1) Introducing the skill; 2) Explaining the skill; 3) Demonstrating and modeling the skill; 4) Reviewing the skill; 5) Applying and practicing the skill; 6) Reflecting on the skill.

Using this annotated template, students worked in groups of four to develop lesson plans in the content areas of mathematics (addition and subtraction), the geography of Cambodia and Southeast Asia, and science. While they worked on the lesson plans, students thought it would be best to write the lesson plans on a continuum of complexity. Each content unit included lessons at a beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The students' rationale for this approach was that it provides the teacher with the flexibility to adapt lessons to the level of the student. Using the template and this developmental approach, Defiance College students developed twelve lesson plans.

Students also summarized concepts from educational psychology in seven brief reports on the 1) Purpose of lesson plan goals; 2) How to assess and



document students' learning in relation to the lesson plan goals; 3) How to use assessment results to plan for preparing future lesson goals; 4) Positive reinforcement; 5) The zone of proximal development; 6) Scaffolding; and 7) Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

All the materials were translated into Khmer, copied, and bound for the teachers in Cambodia who attended the training workshops.

This collaborative effort resulted in three positive outcomes. The first and most obvious was the development of needed teacher training materials written in Khmer. The second had to do with the Defiance College students themselves. In order to write the lesson plans, they had to immerse themselves in the Cambodian educational system and wider culture. They had to place themselves in front of classrooms half a world away. For some students, this was an enlightening experience. To paraphrase one student, "She had to unlearn all she had learned about teaching in Ohio and relearn what it meant to teach in Cambodia." Consequently, they felt connected to teachers in another part of the world without leaving their own classroom. This connection led to the third outcome. Although they could not travel to Cambodia, the early childhood education students were recognized as members of the learning community. As Dr. Burkhardt remarked, without their efforts, the lesson plans would not have been written because the learning community members were busy working on their own projects.

This was a unique opportunity for Defiance College students to participate in "Distance Service Learning." They made an important contribution to fulfilling an expressed need of teachers in Cambodia. In return, the students learned about how to teach in very different conditions and with limited materials. Despite the differences between Ohio and Cambodia, the aspiring teachers and those in the classroom shared the same passion for teaching. Each time they stood before the class, they wanted to be prepared and ready to teach a meaningful lesson. Both groups were motivated by the desire to help all children learn.

REFERENCES

- Flores, M. & Kaylor, M. (2007). The effects of a direct instruction program on the fraction performance of middle school students at-risk for failure in mathematics. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34(2), 84-94.
- Kim, T., & Axelrod, S. (2005). Direct instruction: An educators' guide and a plea for action. *The Behavior Analyst Today*, 6(2), 111-120.
- Rittle-Johnson, B. (2006). Promoting transfer: Effects of self-explanation and direct instruction. *Child Development*, 77(1), 1-15.