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International Fieldwork: Creating, Partnering and Expanding Culturally-Relevant Learning Experiences

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(Abstract): This poster presents international partnerships, creation and implementation of a fieldwork experience for occupational therapy (OT) students from the United States, and the transformative process it offers OT practitioners.

(Learning Objectives):

- 1.) Identify key partnerships involved in creating an international fieldwork experience for OT students.
- 2.) Understand an educational experience that engages students in culturally-sensitive interventions for children with disabilities in Ghana.
- 3.) Identify learning opportunities that infuse cultural awareness and sensitivity into OT practice.

(Description):

Alongside the passage of the Ghana Disability Rights Bill in 2006, an international fieldwork experience was developed. Partnerships including a graduate OT program in Los Angeles, California, USA, a fieldwork educator from the USA, and a boarding school for children with disabilities in Ghana sponsored by a non-government organization. OT students and supervising practitioners traveled to Ghana for an annual short-term fieldwork experience. Working in pairs and immersed in an international context, the OT students assessed the children, developed and implemented treatment plans, and educated workers and parents to promote engagement in culturally-relevant everyday occupations.

(Results/Outcomes): OT students and practitioners participating in a transformative fieldwork experience developed a deeper appreciation for cultural differences, a broader understanding of social participation, social responsibility, and disability rights in a country and culture different than their own. Collaboration with Community-based Rehabilitation students from a local university in Ghana enabled exploration of diverse cultural perspectives. They learned to appreciate and utilize local resources, reflect on practice alternatives and the contribution OT has for all persons regardless of where they live in the world. Occupational science concepts such as occupational deprivation and the importance role occupations have in promoting health and well-being were illuminated.

(Conclusion): International fieldwork opportunities provide current and future occupational therapists with a rich experience and life-altering perspective of the OT process.

(Contribution to the Practice of Occupational Therapy):

Students and practitioners involved in this program, through self-reflection about the culture in which they worked, emerged with an increased awareness of the value and importance of individual and societal rights to occupational engagement for people with disabilities, and appreciation for global possibilities for OT practice.