

EDUCATION Fieldwork

An Anti-Voluntourist Perspective

WHAT WILL YOU BE DOING?

You will be going into local schools and organizations for your field experience. You will observe and participate in these placements and connect what you see and learn to class.

As admirably altruistic as it sounds, the problem with voluntourism is its singular focus on the volunteer's quest for experience, as opposed to the recipient community's actual needs. " - Rafia Zakaria

WHAT IS VOLUNTOURISM AND WHY IS IT SO HARMFUL?

- Voluntourism generally refers to traveling somewhere or going abroad and then volunteering in the given location, typically for shorter periods of time, which range from an afternoon, a couple weeks, to possibly a year long program.
- It many times refers to people traveling to volunteer in work that is not particularly skilled. Some examples include teaching English, building schools, or helping out community members for a brief time.
- Voluntourism can take jobs away from local workers, spend more money on the volunteers expenses than the actual volunteer project, and not create long term solutions as the experience of the volunteer is put before the thoughts and opinions of the community.

For more concrete examples please refer to the additional resources below.



HOW CAN YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCE PERPETUATE THE HARMS OF VOLUNTOURISM

- You will be traveling to a different district or are that may be in a location that is very different to what you are used to. This is very similar to the voluntourism experience, and may come along with assumptions and bias.
- As with the voluntourist experience you will be coming in from the outside, creating an interesting power dynamic that you need to consider.
- You may see problems that you want to fix and it may also seem like the solution is simple, but this could be perpetuating a voluntourist perspective.

"Typically other people's problems seem simpler, uncomplicated and easier to solve than those of one's own society" - Rafia Zakaria

- If you view yourself as the savior, having all the answers, and don't ask questions, you may be perpetuating voluntourism.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

(please check them out!)

Informative online articles about harms of voluntourism:

The Voluntourist's Dilemma by Jacob Kushner, The New York Times Magazine
The White Tourist's Burden by Rafia Zakaria, Aljazeera America

A funny and critical take on the white savior complex:

@barbiesavior on instagram
www.barbiesavior.com

HOW DO YOU APPLY AN ANTI-VOLUNTOURIST PERSEPTIVE TO YOUR WORK?

- You need to ASK QUESTIONS! This literally means asking questions of the people around you; students, teachers, etc. But you need to be asking yourself questions.
 - Though this is about your own learning, remember not just to think about the "me." Ask what yourself, what is my purpose in doing this field experience?
 - What is my role in this classroom/organization? How do I negotiate this with the teacher/leader? What power do I have and how do I use or not use it?
 - What am I seeing and what am I also not seeing (behind the scenes administrative work, curriculum, policy, life beyond the classroom, and more)? How does this effect the way I think about the classroom and the problems I may perceive?
 - How do my bias and assumptions effect what I perceive?

- Consider what has allowed you to be in a position to take part in this class and have the opportunity to do this field work; assess your own privilege.
 - REFLECT! Write about your experience. Think about your interactions, thoughts, and position in this field work experience critically.
 - If you want to help fix a problem, consider if you are doing it in a way that is truly helping the school or organization. Have you spoken to all those involved? Are you the best person to help?