

Fall 1995

Kuwait Special Educators Program

William R. Nelson

Linda Friedman

James L. Narduzzi
University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/spcs-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Special Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nelson, William R., Linda Friedman, and James L. Narduzzi. "Kuwait Special Educators Program." *Continuing Higher Education Review* 59, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 157-65.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Professional and Continuing Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Professional and Continuing Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

PROGRAM NOTE

Kuwait Special Educators Program

William R. Nelson
Linda Friedman
University of Hartford

James L. Narduzzi
University of Richmond, Virginia

The United States has long been recognized as a world leader in responding to the developmental needs of individuals with mental retardation (Rowitz, 1989). Particular strengths exist in the educational arena, both in traditional settings as well as in the vocational area (Glidden & Zetlin, 1992; Clark & Kolstoe, 1990; Wehmen, 1990; Schlack, McGaughey, & Kiernan, 1989). Because of these strengths, an increasing number of international groups are seeking training opportunities to study these practices. In July 1992, the Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of Kuwait in Washington, D.C. issued a request for proposals directed at special education practices in the United States. At the University of Hartford, the Division of University Programs and Conferences responds to international initiatives of this type, usually in collaboration with the Office of International Studies and one or more of the nine schools and colleges that comprise the university. In this instance, a proposal was developed and submitted in collaboration with the School of Education. The Embassy accepted the proposal.

What follows is a description of the program with a focus on curriculum and administrative supports. Issues of replicability along with a discussion of the unique challenges of working with this particular clientele will also be addressed.

William R. Nelson is an assistant professor in the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professor at the University of Hartford.

Linda J. Friedman is an assistant director of Continuing and Professional Education at the University of Hartford.

James L. Narduzzi is the dean of the School of Continuing Studies at the University of Richmond, Virginia.

THE PROGRAM

ACADEMIC AND CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The program was designed to familiarize the Kuwaiti special educators with the current approaches and practices being implemented in serving the educational, residential, vocational and recreational needs of individuals with mental retardation in the United States today. Intensive in nature, the program included both an instructional classroom component as well as an experiential component.

The instructional component involved the presentation of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that support programs and practices. Topics that were presented and discussed included models of disability, causes of mental retardation, assessment and evaluation, family issues, legal issues, residential options, curriculum and instructional approaches, and vocational training options.

The instructional classroom component of the program lasted for ten days, with daily sessions of approximately six hours. Due to the varied levels of English language proficiency among the participants, the material presented by faculty experts and practitioners in the field of mental retardation was immediately translated to ensure comprehension. The speakers then fielded questions from the Kuwaiti educators. This process, while slow, proved quite productive and facilitated comprehension of the concepts discussed.

In the experiential component, the participants visited educational and training sites, as well as recreational programs. These observational visits included both urban and suburban public elementary and secondary schools where individuals with mental retardation were integrated into general education classrooms. The educators also visited three special schools devoted to instruction specifically for individuals with mental retardation.

The participants visited residential sites including group homes for children and adults, supported apartment living programs, as well as a visit to a small public residential institution. Typically, the educators from Kuwait visited the group homes in groups of four to six individuals in order to ensure sufficient opportunities for interaction.

Among the vocational programs visited were sheltered workshop training programs and supported employment sites supervised by job coaches; both were administered by local associations for individuals with

mental retardation. These supported employment opportunities included office type clerical situations, restaurants and cafeterias, grounds keeping and landscaping services, supermarkets, and custodial operations.

The participants visited leisure and recreation programs such as summer camps for children with disabilities and adult recreation programs involving swimming, bowling, basketball, body building, and aerobic exercise. The educators from Kuwait also attended a social meeting of a local chapter of a national self-advocacy group called People First.

Group meetings of the participants were held periodically during the experiential component of the program. At these meetings, which were interpreted by a translator, participants discussed concerns and questions originating from the various site visits. Also during these meetings representatives for organizations such as the Down Syndrome Congress and the People First Organization elaborated on the nature and mission of their respective organizations.

At the conclusion of the program, the Kuwaiti educators completed both an evaluation instrument designed to assess their view of the program and a survey to gauge their reactions to the approaches they observed to education and services provided to Americans with mental retardation.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

Attention to program content is obviously an essential ingredient for successful programming. Equally essential and sometimes overlooked, however, is the importance of effective and client-centered support services. Discussed below are a number of services we make available to all of our international clients.

HOUSING

Participants and their families were housed in furnished air-conditioned apartments conveniently located on campus. Apartments were fully equipped providing wall-to-wall carpeting, complete galley kitchens, handicap accessibility, and easy access to laundry facilities. Each apartment was outfitted with linens, towels, kitchen and cooking utensils, dishes, glasses, and a variety of housewares and cleaning supplies. The university's on-site Summer Housing Office assisted in readying the apartments for the group's arrival, conducted check-in and check-out procedures, and provided 24-hour staff support services to address any individual requests or concerns.

TRANSPORTATION

A detailed schedule outlining shuttle bus routes to site visits at local schools, private agencies and group homes, plus extra curricular activities including weekly prayer services and shopping was implemented by the university's Office of Public Safety. The group of 25 special educators were divided into four small groups who were transported daily to different designated sites for the experiential learning component of the program. Airport to campus roundtrip transportation upon group arrival and departure was also provided.

LANGUAGE FLUENCY

To aid in the establishment of the four small groups, English language testing was administered by the university's English Language Institute the day following the group's arrival with test results made available immediately. Translation services, needed during site visits and classroom presentations, were provided by native Arabic speakers identified by the university's Foreign Language Department and Office of International Studies.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Office of International Studies served as a valuable resource to university faculty and staff administrating the program, and to the Kuwaiti special educators. Through their sharing of significant information relative to Kuwaiti culture, religion, customs, and lifestyle, the program faculty and staff became more aware of both cultural similarities and cultural differences, which enhanced program planning and implementation. Although many of the Kuwaitis had lived or traveled in the U.S. before, they consulted the Office of International Studies for information regarding travel, VISAs, ethnic food shopping, car rentals, and meeting other international program participants.

TELEPHONE, MAIL, AND BANKING SERVICES

The university provided phones and established individual accounts for service, billing, and payment for each program participant. To ensure accurate mail delivery, each participant was given a specific on-campus address and each was assigned a campus mailbox with a confidential combination number. Banking services were made available through the on-campus branch of a large commercial bank.

LESSONS LEARNED

All clients and all programs pose challenges for continuing educators. International clients in particular often test the limits of our systems because we must respond to the unique needs of clients from a different culture and therefore usually having a different set of intellectual and service expectations. Our experience with similar client groups has helped us to identify a set of services typically requiring our attention, many of which have been identified above. What follows is a brief discussion of the issues that emerged specific to this particular group and that we must now add to our ever-growing list of considerations for future programming.

PRO-ACTIVE PLANNING

Establishing on-going contact with the Kuwaiti program administrator who accompanied the special educators to the university proved to be a key contribution to the program's success. Communications regarding program curriculum and participants began months before the group arrived and were enhanced by the Kuwaiti administrator's visit to the university a month before the program began. Input received from the administrator enabled us to plan a program that reflected both the educational and personal experience that the special educators were hoping to receive during their stay. Advance planning was also required to bring necessary university departments on line with the program, schedule appropriate site visits for the experiential component, and secure expert presenters for the classroom experience. It must be noted that although extensive pro-active planning proved to be invaluable, it was important to maintain a high degree of flexibility and openness to change based on participants' requests and concerns.

GENDER ISSUES

The issue of the need for separation of men and women was clearly identified before the group's arrival and was prevalent throughout all aspects of program planning and delivery. Apartments housing men were located in a separate wing away from the women's accommodations. The group of 25 was divided into two groups of men and two groups of women always separated when riding on the buses or seated in the classroom. Separate seating in the classroom still proved uncomfortable for some of the special educators during discussions related to the genetic causes of mental retardation and the viewing of films depicting deplorable conditions that existed in institutions prior to the evolution of group homes. The participants planned separate social activities where the women would get together to dance and sing, and the men would meet to talk and smoke. Husbands accompanying their wives who were program participants occa-

sionally found it difficult to accept their nonparticipatory role. For example, as a result of their wives being registered participants of the program, telephone, banking, and other administrative services were in their wives' names eliminating their involvement in these transactions. Continued recognition and ongoing attempts at understanding of the more dominant male role in Kuwait society made it easier to work with the gender issues that continually surfaced during the program.

HEALTH ISSUES AND MEDICAL INSURANCE

Appropriate medical coverage must be obtained for each international program participant and every accompanying family member well in advance of the program date. The Kuwaitis were unclear as to the type of coverage required and what, if any, medical insurance had been provided for them. Completed medical forms highlighting serious/ chronic illnesses for all participants and family members should also be provided before arrival. Since specific incidences relating to poor health did occur during the 6-week program, strong consideration should be given against sending participants or family members who are not in good health.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Kuwait is a wealthy, prosperous, nation that has assimilated some Western customs, but still remains true to its Islamic traditions and way of life. The variance in individual assimilation of western culture impacted upon group member interaction within and outside of the group. Although always acting with respect and politeness, the special educators would not participate in any part of the established curriculum that they determined unnecessary. If a classroom or on-site experience was considered uninteresting or redundant, they would insist on returning to their apartments. On occasion, this adjustment in scheduling required university faculty and staff to smooth over hard feelings left with local agencies and schools who had opened their doors to the group. Even though the special educators praised Americans for their role in the Gulf War in 1991, they had no interest in America's history or any related organized sightseeing opportunities. Weekends found them shopping or traveling extensively to New York, Canada and Florida. Not only were our initial assumptions incorrect as to their behavior as program participants, but so were their expectations concerning the roles and services provided to them by university personnel. Early in the program it became evident that we needed to establish clear boundaries regarding program responsibilities. Specifically, a group meeting was held in which we shared expectations and reviewed protocol and, throughout the experience, we maintained close contact with the on-site Kuwaiti administrator.

THE GULF WAR

The War itself and U.S. involvement proved to be a continuous topic of conversation among the participants. They arrived at the university with extensive material on the war which they intended to display and pass out to all the sites visited. Upon reviewing the books and posters, we found the materials to be too graphic for American taste and explained to the Kuwaitis our reluctance for their distribution. We did, however, encourage discussion of their experiences and found this to be a useful means of interaction between Americans and Kuwaitis.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Contrary to our initial assumptions, those participants with better English language skills or who had previously lived or studied in the U.S. did not emerge as group leaders. This role was given to the older male members of the group without regard to their position in the Kuwaiti education system's hierarchy. Even though a few participants stood out as group leaders, it was very apparent that all participants expected equal treatment regardless of whether the issue involved the style/location of their apartments to any services provided in the program. Even the slightest variation was contested. Group interactions during the experiential components of the program were enhanced by the presence of graduate students who helped to keep participants on task and advised them as to appropriate protocol when visiting schools and agencies. The success of both the small groups and total group experience can also be attributed to the hands-on role assumed by the individual university faculty and staff program coordinators who were in daily contact with the participants, the Kuwaiti program administrator, site representatives, and classroom instructors.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONCERNS

Instructors found that the services of a translator within the classroom presented more challenges than anticipated. Communication of material was often dependent upon the ability of the translator to successfully illustrate the points being made by the instructor. Since participant feedback was limited and very few questions asked, the instructors had no idea as to the accuracy of the translation. This particular concern could be alleviated by securing the services of a translator who is knowledgeable of the field of study. Coverage of material was also affected by the time it took to translate aspects of the instructors' presentations, and the time participants took to discuss the material among themselves. Cultural references often used by instructors to make a point or to connect with the class were lost and as a result humor was not an effective tool for facilitating interaction. However, instructors also felt that reviewing and questioning the suitability of their material in regards to the norms and mores of the participants was essential to effective instruction.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

The Kuwait Special Educators Program was not originally planned as a research project. However, at the conclusion of the program the educators completed an evaluation instrument that was designed to assess their views of the program's effectiveness. Further, the participants completed a survey instrument that provided information regarding their reactions to the approaches to education and services provided by Americans with mental retardation.

These efforts to garner information regarding the program's effectiveness and the reactions were positive in two ways. One, the feedback from the participants provided clear information regarding the perceived worth of the experiences at the site visit locations as well as the perceived quality of the presentations provided by experts in the field of mental retardation. Clearly, this information will be invaluable in planning future programs. Two, the information garnered from the survey instruments focusing on the reactions of the Kuwaiti educators to the education and service provided Americans with mental retardation yielded valuable information on the sociocultural implications of the experiences provided. This information has been culled into a manuscript that elaborates the reactions of the educators in relation to the sociocultural implications. Thus, a contribution to the literature has been achieved. Program planning efforts should include considerations of what will be and could be learned about the participants and the subject addressed by the program. Identifying a source through which to disseminate the information and then disseminating the information achieved will increase the contributions of the program beyond that of just the professional enrichment of the participants.

In the future in conducting similar programs, program effectiveness efforts should consider the impact of the program upon the participants in both the short-run and the long-run. Upon completion of a professional enrichment program, participants should be surveyed to determine what they believe they will embrace and implement in their future professional activities.

Ideally, follow-up efforts at one-, three-, and six-month intervals as well as at one- and two-year intervals will establish which facets of the program proved most valuable to the participants' professional productivity. Hence, this information can lead to shaping future programs that lead to maximum productivity for participants.

CONCLUSIONS

This award-winning program was successful due to a number of factors:

- pro-active/flexible planning responsive to the ongoing evolution of the experience;
- recognition and sensitivity to cultural diversity which was manifested in instructional and human services;
- ample support services;
- on-site participant/administrator who facilitated collaboration and cooperation between the participants and program administrators.

The Kuwait Special Educators Program was both innovative and creative in its curriculum, administration and implementation. It presented the opportunity to further develop and expand the university's international initiatives and served to enhance linkages between the University and the larger community. Although the program's success can be reflected in its financial return, the high level of participant satisfaction and likelihood of future replication must also be recognized.

REFERENCES

- CLARK, G. M. & KOLSTOE, O. P. (1990). *CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES*. BOSTON, MA: ALLYN AND BACON.
- GLIDDEN, L. M. & ZETLIN, A. G. (1992). *ADOLESCENCE AND COMMUNITY ADJUSTMENT*. IN LOUIS ROWITZ, (ED.), *MENTAL RETARDATION IN THE YEAR 2000*, 101-114. NEW YORK: SPRINGER VERLAG.
- ROWITZ, L. (1989). TRENDS IN MENTAL RETARDATION IN THE 1990s. *MENTAL RETARDATION*, 77, III-VI.
- SCHLACK, R. L., MCGAUGHEY, M. J. & KIERNAN, W. E. (1989). PLACEMENT INTO NONSHELTERED EMPLOYMENT: FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT SURVEYS. *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF MENTAL RETARDATION*, 94, 80-87.
- WEHMEN, P. (1990). SCHOOL-TO-WORK: ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS. *TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN*, 23,(1) 40-43.