

Peruvian trip informs lessons in diversity

Pasadena's Marshall Fundamental Secondary School Principal Mark Anderson wrote the following report after a trip to Peru intended to give participants lessons that can be used when they return to their school sites.

In July 2012 I took the opportunity to travel to Peru and hike the Inca Trail with Global Exploration for Educators Organization. GEEO is a nonprofit organization that plans vacations to fit teachers' calendars and budgets.

When I spoke with Jesse Weisz, CEO, he explained he created this organization because he wanted to encourage educators to think globally. Traveling and immersing in diverse cultures has always been a passion of mine. As a young adult I volunteered in Brazil for a few years; it was there that I developed a passion for teaching and for cultural diversity.

From that seed planted in Brazil, I have traveled to all the continents except Antarctica, in each one working and becoming a part of the culture – opening up my mind and heart to learn from the great people around the world.

This passion for diversity led me to defend my dissertation on cultural proficiency and seek out educational positions in diverse communities.

Now, as a principal of Marshall Fundamental in Pasadena, we have developed a value to Embrace Diversity. GEEO was a conduit for me to continue my work on cultural diversity and proficiency and travel



An educational trip to Peru offered Principal Mark Anderson the opportunity to work alongside local families and to bring lasting cultural lessons back to his school.

with like-minded educators.

GEEO offers a unique variety of trips around the world. I chose the Peru trip because it fit my schedule, I wanted to explore the ancient Incan empire, and it gave me the opportunity to add on a trip to the Galapagos. The GEEO-sponsored portion of the trip through Peru was 12 days and included Lima, Cuzco, hiking the Inca Trail, and Ollantaytambo.

We spent two days and a night in a local community near Cuzco, called Ccaccacollo, where we stayed in the

homes of local families and worked in the fields alongside them. The ladies of the family invited me into their kitchens, and I worked over the open fire with them making authentic Peruvian food.

I was also fortunate to be with a family with many children, and they spent the days running and playing with us in the fields as we worked.

In this close-knit community, we also visited the local school. As it was summer vacation, the school was closed, but all the children came out to meet us anyhow and challenged us to a game of soccer – we lost.

Throughout the trip we had excellent guides. We mountain biked through the Andes, visited historical and cultural museums and ruins, and

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hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, where we were fortunate to arrive on a cloudless morning. We were a small group traveling together. All were teachers and our families, and I was the lone principal. Being in a group where we bonded over our passion for learning and diversity fortified this experience and helped build an international professional network.

Part of traveling with GEEO is each educator is required to focus on

how to learn and find something to apply at one's school site. As a school, we systemically celebrate cultural diversity; each year we conduct four multicultural assemblies to celebrate diversity. Through this travel, I collected artifacts and ideas, and learned about the greatness of the Incas to celebrate with the students at one of our assemblies.

But the heart of what I learned and experienced is not something eas-

ily written about or applied to school plans. Travelling and immersing myself in diverse cultures teaches me that there are sundry ways to learn, to live, to laugh, to cry, to be. It is powerful to experience going to a small town and not understanding how they cook, work, and live and being forced to learn all these things again – life is not necessarily better or worse, just different.

When we recognize in our own students the diverse cultures and the different ways in which they are raised and learn and will be, and are not scared of these differences but celebrate and encourage them, then we will create stronger fabrics of care, trust and intelligence in our community and create better schools for all our children.

In planning a trip with GEEO here are some helpful tips:

- The price is exclusive to educators. If you bring a family member or friend who is not an educator, there is a surcharge.
- GEEO plans trips for those who want to experience new places and not spend a lot of money. This also means the accommodations, while safe and clean, are budget hotels.
- If you get a group of educators on your own, GEEO will plan a trip tailored to your specific needs.

Check out the website for the 2013 trips at www.geeo.org.

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