

Training vs. Education: There is a Difference

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One of the things I have found frustrating in my missions career is the penchant Americans have for confusing education with training. While there are areas of overlap between the two concepts, they do not describe the same thing and, in practice, they are quite different. It is similar to the problem of confusing language learning with cultural learning. The two things are related and help each other, but one does not replace the other and learning language should not be assumed to give you great cultural insights into a host culture. As Duane Elmer points out in his book, *Cross Cultural Servanthood*, language learning without cultural understanding runs the risk of making us all, “grammatically correct fools.” With that warning in mind, let’s take a closer look at the subject.

Education is a process of giving or receiving systematic instruction, it can also mean an enlightening experience. In practical American terms, it is often focused on gaining knowledge. Training, on the other hand, is about preparing for a specific task or teaching specific skills or behaviors. I like to put it this way: being educated about missions is to **know** more about *missions*. Being trained as a missionary is to learn **how** to be a *missionary*. These two things are certainly not opposed to each other, they are complementary! At the same time, if you have only experienced one of them, even if it is of very high quality, you can’t really be prepared for the mission field. In my experience, America does a great job on the education end. Between Bible college, missionary majors, *Perspectives* courses, educational ministries, internships, and many other methods, anyone seriously seeking education in missions will succeed. In contrast, **training** to be a missionary seems to be in much shorter supply.



Church Training in the Republic of Georgia

My experience may be illustrative. I received some great education about missions. Moody Bible Institute's year-long missionary program was incredibly informative and enlightening. The program improved my ability to articulate my beliefs and I was able to use great contextual depth and historical knowledge to test my own ideas and theories about missions. The only thing I was **trained** to do in that program, however, was how to use the Bible. The training I received on how to use and teach the Bible was by far the most useful thing I got from Moody. I also took a version of the *Perspectives* course and worked through a *Perspectives* workbook called "Pathways". The articles were informative and enlightening, and the case studies were references I used for years and years on the field. I also read more than two dozen books focused on different aspects of missions theories, history, tactics, biography, you name it. I read the entire Bible four times (twice for Moody, once for a mission's study, and once for my devotional life) in getting ready for the mission field. All of this in just the course of a year. I was prepared, but in the area of missions training I was lacking. Besides my training in the Bible, the only other training I received was preparation for learning a language at Missions Training International (MTI). At MTI, I was taught how to learn and study a language. I did not learn about linguistics or the theory of language, rather, I was prepared to **learn** a foreign language. Being **trained** instead of being **educated** in how to learn a language was incredibly helpful.

When I finally went to the field, I knew a lot about missions, and I knew a lot about being a missionary, but I knew almost nothing about **how to be** a missionary. Learning what to do as a missionary involved years of effort and a lot of failures. Insights I only formed after 8 years should have been deployed in the beginning of my mission, and while it was not bad to change what I was doing eight years in, it would have been much better to do these things earlier. It was not just me, I met scores of missionaries working all over Eurasia and found *no one* that was really trained to be a missionary. We were all just figuring it out as we went along. When I first received the call to train and prepare missionaries for the field, I realized that was my role to help missionaries in other fields and with other groups of people learn how to be missionaries and therefore get a faster start and avoid early mistakes that nearly every missionary makes. That is why we at MissioSERVE tend to

focus on training and allow the education needed to be done by the many, many other organizations that specialize in that area.



The key to our D3 Training process is **Discover**, **Develop**, and **Deploy**. This is more than just a technique for training, it is a lifestyle we teach our missionaries to pursue even when they are on the field. One of the reasons that there is so little training to be a missionary is because of the difficulty of the task. There are many factors to consider, so much diversity in situations, cultures, and people. I would hesitate or even refuse to tell another missionary exactly what to do on the field I served for 14 years, a country I know well, so how could I tell a missionary how to react or exactly what to do in a different country or a radically different cultural context? Training is not about telling someone what to do, it is about giving them the tools they need to make the best decisions in whatever situation they find themselves in.

Before we conclude this issue, I wanted to address D3 again. There are three steps in D3: Discover, Develop, and Deploy. For a missionary, all three steps are important in their own training process, but the same principles apply to things like language learning and cultural study. In language learning you discover a new part of the language or new words, then you develop them through memorization, pronunciation, and practice, then you deploy the new words or phrases in your daily use. In cultural study you discover a new aspect of culture or social practice, you develop that discovery through research, cultural translators, and observation, then you deploy that knowledge in your missionary life improving cultural engagement, ministry opportunities, and teaching. In this way, the D3 training process prepares the missionary not just to know about life in missions but how to live a mission-focused life.

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I believe deeply that every missionary needs to be trained not just in mission practices, strategies, and theory but in practical things like spiritual warfare, stress relief, cultural discovery, cross cultural partnerships, and much more. We are sending missionaries into very difficult and challenges situations, asking them to advance the Kingdom against the darkness and asking them to just figure it out as they go along. We can and must do better. Every missionary we send should not just be an educated missionary but a trained one!