Leveling the field: making fieldwork in SESE more equitable and accessible

Claire Richardson
SESE Colloquium
February 17th, 2021
What’s the problem?

Fieldwork:
• is key for coursework, instruction, and research
• fosters positive academic and social development
• Presents numerous barriers for students whose backgrounds differ from the traditional majority

These barriers manifest as direct and systemic harm

Elkins & Elkins, 2007; Feig, 2010; Clancy et al., 2014; Giles et al., 2020; Olcott & Downen, 2020; Marín-Spiotta, et al., 2020
So, how do we address these barriers?
The trail to equitable, accessible fieldwork

Develop accessible trips:
Ensure that as much of your trip as possible is wheelchair accessible. Use multiple teaching modalities and technologies.

Minimize costs:
Subsidize gear, travel, etc., make scholarships widely known, and minimize or entirely cut costs where possible.

Discuss policies & expectations:
Include reporting mechanisms and zero-tolerance expectations in field guides and syllabi, and always discuss these policies before leaving for the field.

Evaluate learning outcomes and be flexible:
What skills and concepts are you trying to communicate, and how can you do that in a way that is accessible and equitable? Be ready to adapt if not everyone is able to participate.

Complete a comprehensive risk assessment:
Consider and document potential risks to minoritized students posed by your work location and be ready to deescalate tense situations.

Acknowledge land:
Acknowledge the Native peoples whose land enables your work and seek to develop relationships with them.

Get to know your students & be an active ally:
Students should feel comfortable self-advocating in a space that is actively anti-discriminatory.

Giles et al., 2020; Scerri et al., 2020
In practice, these recommendations:

• Protect students
• Equalize learning experiences
• Improve career preparation
• Increase retention rates
• Create happier, healthier, more productive academic environments for all
• Demonstrate to SESE members that they are essential and valued in their community

Carabajal et al., 2017; Cooke et al., 1997; Nairn et al., 1999; Sugerman, 2001; Whitmeyer et al., 2020
Thanks!