

A Cross-Cultural Immersion Experience in Agricultural Teacher Preparation

TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY
COMMERCE

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Need For Idea

- As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, teacher preparation programs must continue to ensure that preservice educators are prepared to educate a wide range of students.
- Research has indicated a vast majority of preservice educators come from white, rural backgrounds with limited relationships among individuals of other cultures and experiences (LaVergne, Jones, Larke, & Elbert, 2012).
- As schools are put under more scrutiny, teacher preparation programs must find ways to develop teachers who are capable of educating a diverse population.
- One way teacher preparation programs can bring about progressive change is through a cross-cultural immersion experience.

How it Works

- Criteria for urban agricultural education programs are:
 1. Must have a large percentage of non-traditional (particularly youth of color) students,
 2. Must be located in an urban setting.
 3. Must have demonstrable reputation of having a progressive program with SAEs, LDEs, and CDEs.
- Prior to their 12-week student internship, preservice educators go through a 3-week preparation program.
- During the last week, the cultural immersion project is completed by visiting the selected programs.
- Students get the opportunity to tour the school, and facilities, interact with students, and talk with teachers. After the visit, students are debriefed the following day.

Results

- Cross-cultural experiences are necessary to transform and dispel preconceived thoughts and ideas about the unknown.
- The majority of students saw the initiative as an “eye-opener” and had a change of view about urban agriculture education programs..
- Preservice teachers were surprised to learn that many of the teachers had similar perceptions of urban agricultural programs.
- An experience like this can serve as a springboard to preservice teachers’ thinking about diversifying agricultural education programs in a way that an on-campus course cannot.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

- Implementing the cross-cultural immersion in earlier teacher prep courses.
- Collaborating with other teacher prep programs (information exchange).
- Extending the visit to possibly incorporate more of the programs unique characteristics.
- Allowing students to reflect on the visits will increase its effectiveness.
- Pre-service educators need professors who will stimulate, investigate, and guide their thinking throughout the engagement.

Resources Needed

- Transportation provided by the university (passenger bus).
- The group stopped at a local restaurant to dine (between visits). Students paid for their individual lunches.
- Students were instructed to bring something to note take with in case there was something they wanted to remember.
- Professional dress was required and proper identification was needed (visitation passes).

References

- LaVergne, D.D., Jones, W.A., Larke, Jr., A., & Elbert, C.E. (2012). Identifying strategies for diversity inclusive agricultural education programs. *North American Colleges & Teachers of Agriculture Journal*, 56(2), 47-54.

