

NAAE Region 1 Capstone Experience for Agriculture Teacher Candidates

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Teacher educators often explore new ways to foster the development of student teacher professionalism, while helping prospective teachers understand how to address challenges associated with classroom and school life (Hammerness et al., 2005). While it may be impractical to believe that teacher education programs can adequately prepare teachers for all they will be asked to do (Lytle, 2000), educationally, we value our students making connections with current teachers and developing a strong network of support. The idea to bridge the final academic term for our teacher candidates with a week-long experience with teachers in the region seemed to meet the many goals we have for our students.

Early career teachers likely start at a professional knowledge deficit as it is, given that teacher education programs are typically limited by university requirements (Roberts & Kitchel, 2010). Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, and Ball (2008) indicated that agriscience teachers should be lifelong learners, utilizing professional development to sustain current and relevant agriculture programs. Common topics associated with many capstone learning experiences in teacher education include: getting a job, being a reflective teacher, classroom management issues, technology in the classroom, and professional development. The opportunity to collaborate presented itself and we put the teacher candidates together for a combined capstone experience. Agricultural Education professors were agreeable to share the workload of presentations and organizing logistics.

How it Works

Teacher educators across [NAAE Region] were contacted by the lead institution, which took the lead in registering all the students and securing hotel rooms. Each of the participating institutions was responsible for transportation to and from the site of the conference. Thirty-four agriculture teacher candidates attended the regional conference. The teacher candidates included students from five teacher preparation institutions and represented four states as their cooperating teaching sites. The teacher candidates participated in a preservice teacher seminar on Tuesday and then joined practicing agriculture teachers for the remainder of the conference, including workshops, networking, industry tours, and professional development.

Workshops were offered by three different faculty to the entire group of preservice teachers. Sessions included reflecting on the student teaching experience, managing a lab and classroom, giving effective directions, and developing a work/life balance. Lastly, a financial planner was brought in to address saving for retirement. Participants were also assigned homework which was to create a PowerPoint slide that displayed their "Best Idea" from student teaching. The slide was to be self-explanatory and was to be played in a rotation with all other slides during the official Ideas Unlimited session.

Results/Implications

Anecdotal evidence from preservice teachers supports this type of capstone experience, which serves as a bridge into teacher professionalism. One participant stated, “The single largest benefit from the conference I would say was the student teacher portion of the conference, where we were able to get important information on work life balance, finances, and just to get to know some of the other people with whom we will be working for the next 25+ years”. Another participant claimed, “Attending the conference as a student teacher creates buy-in to make us what to return in the coming years”.

Joining preservice teacher cohorts from multiple institutions created a unique regional learning community among the preservice teachers. Additionally, the chance to interact with novice and expert teachers from across the region was of particular interest to our students. One student suggested, “I learned more about the value of being a part of a professional teacher's organization and will continue my involvement as I transition into the teaching profession.”, and another added, “I felt that it was a well-balanced mixture of educational conferences, social time, networking, and even a welcome decompression from teaching...”.

Future Plans/Advice

Ideally, the expansion of the experience to other institutions would help support agricultural education. However, we recognize distance from the conference can be a limiting factor. While this conference was held in a central location and worked for this event, that might not always be feasible for travel. It is recommended institutions annually review where their regional conference is being held and, if manageable, consider combining with other teacher education institutions to implement this preservice capstone event. We should also consider other ways to collaborate more often and continue to offer experience-based educational opportunities for students where they can reflect and plan with peers from outside their home institutions.

Costs

Description	Expense	Notes
Registration	\$100/person	Originally \$150; reduced for students by the host
Transportation	Varied by institution and their distance from the conference	
Lodging	\$46/person/day	Shared hotel rooms with 3 students per room
Misc.	\$100	Snacks, gifts for presenters, supplies

References

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