

It's So Easy, Even a Student Teacher Can Do It!

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## **It's So Easy, Even a Student Teacher Can Do It!**

### **Introduction / Need for Innovation**

The question of how teachers become professionals and members of a learning community, dedicated to student enrichment and development, is one that teacher educators and educational researchers have considered for many years (Hammerness et al., 2005). “How can teacher educators help prospective teachers learn to address the multiple challenges of classroom and school life?” (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 358). Lytle (2000) posited that it is impractical to believe that teacher education programs, graduate programs, or even school inservice programs, can adequately prepare teachers for all they will be asked to do. 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 agriculture teachers should be lifelong learners, utilizing professional development to sustain current and relevant agriculture programs.

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) argued that teacher professional development is one key to teacher change, and that “teachers are themselves learners who work in a learning community” (p. 948). The sense of fellowship found in a learning community can often be the difference between longevity and attrition, especially for new teachers in the early stages of their career (Phipps et al., 2008). Learning communities, in which learners (teachers) are active participants, are often referred to as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis...” (p. 4). One potential introduction to active engagement in a professional development community of practice is to require preservice teachers to present a workshop at the Oregon Agriculture Teacher’s Association fall inservice.

### **How it Works**

The Oregon Agriculture Teachers Association hosts an annual fall inservice for agriculture teacher professional development. The program consists of a full day of inservice workshops facilitated by teachers, university faculty, Oregon FFA staff, stakeholders and program supporters, and association leadership. Each year the student teacher cohort presents workshop material at the conference.

Past workshops have taken on many different forms, based on requests from the association, needs expressed by agriculture teachers, and interests, abilities, and sizes of the annual student teacher cohort. For example, as teachers were faced with implementation of the Common Core State Standards, the cohort presented a workshop on how to implement these standards into bell ringers and activities and included a set of pre-planned lesson drop-ins across multiple content areas. In a year where science and math integration was the focus, the cohort assembled a session on using pop bottles to create science experiments and offered pre-planned lessons with integrated math components. Since the preservice cohort tends to be more tech-savvy than the more experienced teachers, many sessions have revolved around classroom technologies. In years where we have had larger groups, they have been divided into two separate teams offering different sessions.

This year was presented in an “Ideas Unlimited” format, where student teachers brought innovative teaching/program ideas and workshop participants were given the opportunity to circulate around the room to have conversations with the presenters about their ideas. The student teacher cohort members also attend other workshops, participate in committee meetings, and network with Oregon agriculture teachers.

### **Results-to-Date / Implications**

Oregon State University’s agricultural education student teacher cohort has been attending Oregon Agriculture Teachers Association for at least the last 15 years. The collaboration between the student teacher cohort and the Oregon Agriculture Teachers Association during the fall inservice has been positive. It allows the students an opportunity to develop and practice presenting prior to their full-time student-teaching experience. The process of planning the workshop serves to expose students to facilitation and workshop design in a collaborative manner as the students decide the content and format as a group. Participants have an opportunity to create teaching aids such as posters, handouts, and demonstrations. Another important result is that the student teaching cohort has an opportunity to network with Oregon agriculture teachers and other stakeholders who attend including Oregon Department of Education staff, FFA Alumni state leaders, FFA Foundation staff, community college faculty and administrators. They are introduced to the state professional organization and membership benefits, and identify the importance of professional development. Current agriculture teachers appreciate the new ideas that the student teachers share, as well as meeting the new individuals in the profession. Feedback has been positive from both the student teachers and agriculture teachers who attend the workshop.

### **Future Plans/Advice**

Oregon State University plans to have the student teaching cohort participate and present a workshop during the Oregon Agriculture Teachers Association fall conference in future years. Cohorts will have the opportunity take ownership of the workshop format. We recommend other teacher education programs and state agriculture teacher associations collaborate to provide preservice teachers, particularly those at the end of their programs, an opportunity to present and to introduce them to the agriculture teachers learning community. Building or strengthening the relationship with your state’s conference planners can help make this possible.

### **Costs / Resources**

The student teaching cohort paid for their own materials which varied depending on the idea they chose to share. Students’ printed posters of their idea using on-campus resources are included as part of their student fees. The OSU agricultural education department paid for a university van to travel to and from the day-long inservice (at university motor pool rates) as well as the printing of take-home, note card sized version of their posters and takeaways for the teachers in attendance. The Oregon Agriculture Teacher Organization did not charge registration for the student teachers. Total cost for this year’s event was less than \$300. However, cost varies based on location. The fall inservice site moves around this relatively large state to distribute cost for teacher attendance at this one-day event. In years where the event is held on the opposite side from the teacher education institution, we incur the cost of hotels and increased travel cost to have the cohort in attendance.

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