

**A Day in Their Shoes: Lived Experiences of Five Agricultural
Education Teachers Working with English Learners**

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Introduction

In recent years, a notable change has occurred in schools across the country. Demographic changes have resulted in an increase of student diversity, including students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Hollie, 2012; O’Neal, Ringler & Rodriguez, 2008; Samson & Collins, 2012; Talbert & Edwin 2008). One reason for this demographic change is the ever-increasing number of immigrants within schools. Immigration has an impact on many different areas of American life, however the impact is felt the most in U.S. public schools (Banks & Banks, 2010). As a result of the increase in student diversity, teachers are experiencing an increase in the number of linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (Batt, 2008; DelliCarpini & Alonson, 2014; Mather, 2009; O’Neal, Ringler & Rodriguez, 2008). As meeting the learning needs of English Learner (EL) students in the classroom becomes a requisite skill for teachers, the teacher preparation (or lack thereof) in this area has become a point of concern.

Many studies centered on diversity (Alston, English, Graham, Wakefield, & Farbotko, 2010; LaVergne, Elbert & Jones, 2011; Talbert & Edwin, 2008; Warren & Alston, 2007) have been conducted within agricultural education. Alston, English, Graham, Wakefield, and Farbotko (2010) probed the readiness of secondary agricultural education teachers in the United States to use inclusive learning environments. Their study found that agricultural education teachers are prepared to teach certain populations, but may not be well prepared to teach students who are religiously diverse, questioning gender identity, EL students and special education students. Other than this study, there remains limited research centered on agricultural education teachers and their work with linguistically diverse students within the United States.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the current study was based on Dunkin and Biddle’s Teaching and Learning Model (1974). The study’s framework focused on different factors from the Teaching and Learning Model that may impact experiences of agricultural education teachers teaching EL students and the teachers’ reflections on those experiences. Presage, context, and process were three of the four model variables that specifically guided this study.

Methodology

This phenomenology study aimed to capture experiences of agricultural education teachers teaching EL students. Teachers in this study were chosen based on secondary schools that had both an agricultural education program and a student EL population of at least 15%. As a result, five agricultural education teachers from the Midwest were chosen and were interviewed using a semi-structure approach. Interview questions were designed based on the conceptual framework. Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed and coded. Codes were then combined as themes emerged. While the

researcher was the main instrument, another agricultural teacher reviewed the codes. The use of member checks was included to increase trustworthiness of the study.

Results

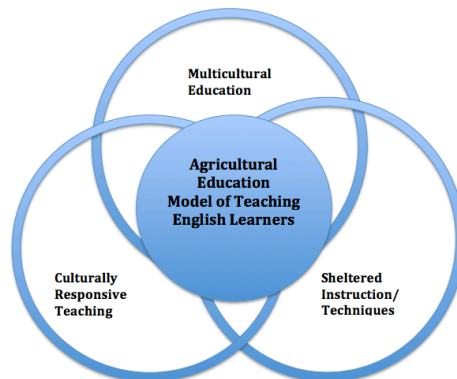
Ten main themes emerged regarding the experiences of teaching EL students.

- It was important to build relationships with students
- There was a need for better teacher preparation
- There was a need to understand diverse student cultures
- The teaching experience was challenging, frustrating and/or stressful at times
- It was beneficial to collaborate with an EL teacher
- Teacher self-efficacy increased over time
- ELs needed to be taught at a slower pace
- It was important to be patient when working with EL students
- Mixed language level classes were difficult to teach
- Teacher’s formative experiences influenced the classroom teacher and the student experience

Conclusions

As a result of the study, an Agricultural Education EL Model was developed to address the foundational knowledge needed to teach EL students. The model highlights the importance of incorporating multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and sheltered instruction techniques into classroom instruction.

Agricultural Education Model of Teaching English Learners



(Adapted from Diversity Inclusive Program Model (LaVergne, 2008))

Recommendations

At a school level, it is recommended that school districts provide professional development centered on EL instructional strategies and learning about the diverse cultures of students represented within their specific schools. In addition, teachers would benefit from learning about language acquisition and EL language levels.

At a national level, it is recommended that a quantitative study be conducted to determine the number of agriculture teachers within the United States that teach EL students and that a survey be conducted to gather more information about the opportunities and challenges of teaching EL students within agriculture programs.

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