

Benefits of Teaching English in Japan as an Agricultural Education Major

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日本で農業専攻として英語を教えることのメリット

Introduction

Field-based experiences are an essential and integral part for any teacher education preparation program (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Maynard, La Paro, & Johnson, 2014) and exist in several flavors including early field experiences (EFE) and student teaching. In agricultural education, as well as other content areas, EFE provide vital preparation (Aiken & Day, 1999; Smalley & Retallick, 2011) by encouraging preservice teachers to apply their knowledge and skill in various ways such as observing a cooperating teacher, teaching lessons, and tutoring students (NCATE, 2008). EFE, as described by Smalley & Retallick, occur before student teaching.

Preservice teachers can gain multiple benefits by completing field-based experiences in international settings. Benefits of these experiences include an increase of intercultural awareness, confidence, and competence (Cross & Dunn, 2016; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Gilson & Martin, 2010; Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Romano, 2008). Cross and Dunn demonstrated the value of international student teaching experiences in developing teacher candidates to teach diverse learners. Opportunities for international student teaching in agricultural education are limited due to a lack of secondary level agriculture programs in most countries. Teaching English in Japan provides an international EFE opportunity for preservice agricultural education teachers.

How it works

Guy Healy Japan, Ltd., (GHJ) is an international program to promote education and culture exchange between Japan and the United States with the goals of helping build and strengthen friendship, cooperation, and develop trust and understanding. GHJ offers multiple opportunities for U.S. college students to participate in the culture exchange programs. Two programs that are included in this project: USA Summer Camp and English for the Next Generation (ENG) Teaching Internships. Approximately 100 U.S. college students are invited each summer to various USA Summer Camp locations across Japan. Although GHJ utilizes its partner universities to help conduct interviews and provide the initial list of potential candidates, individuals from other institutions can still apply independently. These students serve as American Counselors (ACs) and help lead and implement intensive English immersion activities with Japanese students.

The ENG Teaching Internship involves three U.S. college students at a time who complete three month English teaching internships. The interns will team teach various groups lesson plans, implementing similar programs used in the USA Summer Camp. Duties and expectations include: 1) teaching grades 1-9 with class sizes varying from 13-30 students, 2) Facilitating and teaching nine - 45 minute lessons per week, 3) After school tutoring to a small group for two-60 min lesson per week, 4) Participating in various demonstration classes around Nagasaki prefecture to promote ENG, 5) Working with a local college students to enhance their communications skills, and lastly 6) Creating a video lesson for students (Guy Healy Japan, 2014). Four Agricultural Education majors participated in the Guy Healy Japan USA Summer Camp and one Agricultural Education major also participated in the ENG Teaching Internship.

Results/Implications

Four Agricultural Education majors (two males and two females) from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls participated in the Guy Healy Japan USA Summer Camp and one Agricultural Education major also participated in the ENG Teaching Internship. All of the students agreed that the GHJ Summer Camp and ENG Teaching Internship was beneficial in their preparation for student teaching and/ or future careers. Here are some of the comments received from the students regarding the benefits of the program:

“Yes, it was hard at times [to teach] because of the language barrier. The language barrier just made me be more creative and work harder to help the students practice their English skills and to be engaged and achieve in the activities.”

“When you are working with young students, especially middle school aged students, you experience a wide variety of personalities and behaviors. I would work with students who did not want to sit still and listen to those who were quiet and did not want to talk. Because each group was different, from ability to speak and write in English to personality, I had to learn different ways to engage the students and to make sure that they stayed on topic and that they were challenged to be better. This is one tool I learned that will be very useful during student teaching.”

“These experiences helped shaped who I am and as a teacher... Without this experience I would not have had the chance to directly learn about different cultures, try different foods, learn new languages, meet lifelong friends, and just experience a world that is outside of the U.S., I not only recommend studying abroad as a student, but I think it should be mandatory for personal growth and success in our future careers.”

“Being a part of both the USA Summer Camp and the ENG Teaching Internship, I learned a lot about myself as a person and as an educator. . . . I had created and designed well-laid out lessons and activities for the students, and although I knew the content very well, my students did not always understand, either due to language and/or even cultural differences... These experiences helped me to not only learn how to ‘teach’, but to also be flexible to meet the various needs of my students and address any issues that occurred; thus making me a more confident group leader and teacher.”

Future Plans

Future goals include to: (a) actively promote the Guy Healy Japan and ENG Teaching internship to agriculture teacher candidates to increase participation in the program and (b) host student driven workshops for undergraduate students structured around the benefits of international teaching and internship opportunities.

Costs

Most of the cost of participating in these two programs are covered by Guy Healy Japan, Ltd. In addition to providing for lodging and meals during the program, each individual is awarded a scholarship for air fare. There is a \$150 application fee for the USA Summer Camp program. Personal spending and insurance are not provided through the program and become the only out of pocket expenses while participating in these two programs.

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