

Poster Session in a Methods of Teaching Course: A Poster Poster

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA), enacted in 1975, mandates that children and youth ages 3–21 with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate public school education. According to the National Center of Education Statistics, as of 2015, the number of students served by IDEA was 6.6 million or 13% of all public school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Given that 95% of students served by IDEA are enrolled in regular public schools rather than separate schools for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), and that students with disabilities in secondary Career and Technical Education Programs were found to be less likely to drop out and more like to be employed after high school (Cobb et al., 1999, Colley & Jamison, 1998), Teacher Education Programs around the country must take steps to prepare their pre-service teachers to educate diverse learners.

This fall, one Teacher Education Program in Kentucky implemented a new, innovative way to prepare their pre-service School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) teachers to educate diverse learners in their future classrooms. This idea aligns with Research Priority 5 of the 2016-2020 American Association for Agricultural Education Research Agenda: Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs.

How it Works/Program Phases/Results to Date

Agricultural Education students at the University of Kentucky are required to take a Methods of Teaching Career and Technical Education course during the semester prior to their student teaching experience. This class hones skills pre-service teachers will need to be successful in the classroom while providing a positive learning environment for all students. A unit on teaching to students with disabilities and diversities has always been in the course, but this year the unit was redesigned in an innovative way. In this activity, these senior students created a research-style poster on strategies for teaching to a provided student disability or diversity, and hold a poster session with their classmates in order to deliver the information. Program phases are as follows:

Phase One (Three Months Before): students were randomly assigned a specific disability or diversity to research, and informed of these specific topics to focus their research efforts:

Characteristics or Symptoms, History of Diagnosis/Where Term Was Coined/Treatment Options, Strategies to Teach to the Student, Modifications (if needed), and Resources for the Teacher

Phase Two (One Month Before): students were provided a University-approved poster template to input their research into

Phase Three (Two Weeks Before): University faculty, staff, and other students were invited to attend the poster session

Phase Four (One Week Before): Teaching Assistants received final copies of students' posters electronically, then had the posters printed by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment poster printing service

Phase Five (Day Of): students assembled and set up their own posters and held the poster session during the usual one-hour time period allotted for their class

Phase Six (Following Week): student posters printed on regular 8.5x11" paper and assembled into a packet, distributed to Methods students for future use

Students in this Methods of Teaching Career and Technical Education course thoroughly enjoyed the experience of creating and presenting research posters as a means of learning about teaching to diverse learners, with one stating that it "allowed [them] to create dialogue that shed light on so many different kinds of learners and equipped [them] with skills that [they] can utilize to give all students the education they deserve," and another describing herself as now "confident in teaching to diverse learners in the classroom" (Methods students, personal communication, October 23, 2017).

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Upon completion of this poster session, instructors of the University of Kentucky Methods of Teaching Career and Technical Education course posited a number of improvements to the process in years to come, which should be used as advice to other institutions wanting to conduct a similar activity in their own Teacher Education Program. The first and most important improvement is to provide a more structured rubric or set of guidelines for the poster and poster session. It would benefit the pre-service educators to have this, considering many of our undergraduate students may have never experienced this advanced level of research. In addition, the ability to view examples of acceptable posters would benefit the students in their preparation as well as increase quality of work submitted by students.

When planning the activity during Phase 1, the instructors plan to inform the poster printing service of the date the posters will be needed, so they have plenty of time to plan to meet this order. Additionally, a large enough space to accommodate posters as well as the participants is needed. This innovative idea was conducted in the lobby of a building with many passersby; in the future one would ideally host in a less traffic-heavy area. Furthermore, the instructors plan to split the poster session up into two class periods with half the students presenting each day, in order to give the students the opportunity to learn from their colleagues.

Cost/Resources Needed

A poster session of this scale is relatively inexpensive and simple to conduct. University of Kentucky faculty have access to free poster printing, however this may not be the case in other institutions and the Teacher Education Program would need to absorb the cost of printing. Further resources to purchase include poster boards to bolster the research poster, as well as easels to display them. Refreshments were provided for guests attending the student poster session, which added value to the presentation but is not a crucial cost to the operation. The involvement of faculty and staff from the University was a key component of the poster session. Therefore, conducting the poster session in an environment that is conducive to the participation of guests requires the resources of time and space to organize the posters at a time that is convenient to faculty schedules, in a location that is open and welcoming to conversation.

References

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