

## Exploring My World: A Cultural Awareness Curriculum

Submitted by:

Emily Cox  
Extension Agent  
Mississippi State University  
238 Kaki Street  
Iuka, MS 38852  
(662) 423-7016  
ehc28@msstate.edu

Dr. Julie Sexton  
Extension Professor  
Mississippi State University  
P.O. Box 9745  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
(662) 325-3462  
julie.sexton@msstate.edu

Dr. Kirk A. Swortzel  
Professor, Agricultural Education, Leadership, and Communications  
Mississippi State University  
P.O. Box 9745  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
(662) 325-7837  
kirk.swortzel@msstate.edu

Dr. Tommy Phillips  
Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Sciences  
P.O. Box 9745  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
(662) 325-0655  
tom.phillips@msstate.edu

Dr. Susan Seal  
Executive Director, Center for Distance Education  
P.O. Box 5247  
Mississippi State, MS 39762  
(662) 325-3473  
sseal@humansci.msstate.edu

## **Exploring My World: A Cultural Awareness Curriculum**

### **Need for Innovation Idea**

In an increasingly culturally diverse country, it is of great importance to educate young American children on various cultures. Specifically in Mississippi, where there is currently an influx of immigrants from various countries and cultures, children need to have an understanding of people from different regions as well as their cultural practices (American Immigration Council, 2017). Currently there is no Mississippi 4-H curriculum designed to educate the youth about various cultures. The *Exploring My World* curriculum will help 4-H participants to develop a greater understanding and appreciation for different cultures while using experiential learning activities that are fun and engaging.

There are many benefits of educating youth on various cultures. Youth who are knowledgeable about different cultures generally want to learn more about themselves and their own cultures, appreciate people from various cultures, value different perspectives, adapt more easily to working with people from diverse cultures, and understand how culture impacts a person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Victorson, 2016). Additionally, educating youth about various cultures teaches young people to think critically, to avoid racial prejudices, and to develop better communication skills (Garcia, n.d.; Kennedy, Bronte-Tinkey, & Matthews, 2007). Youth programs integrating multicultural education also have benefits including "potentially promoting healthier psychosocial development for youth" and "preparing youth to enter a multi-cultural workforce and society" (Kennedy et al., 2007, p. 2).

According to the American Immigration Council (2017), there were 72,258 foreign-born individuals residing in Mississippi in 2015. Among the countries of origin of the immigrants were Mexico, India, Vietnam, China, and the Philippines (American Immigration Council, 2017). This number of foreign-born Mississippi residents has increased from 39,908 in 2000, which demonstrates how rapidly the state is becoming more culturally diverse (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). The increase in culturally diverse individuals living in Mississippi further proves the need for a 4-H curriculum that will help youth gain an understanding of various cultures that they will most likely encounter throughout their lives. Furthermore, an important aspect of 4-H is citizenship, which includes 4-H members developing an understanding of different cultures and the importance of global interdependence (Jamison, 2012). Youth who learn about various cultures are better equipped to develop citizenship skills in an increasingly diverse society (Smith & Pate, 2007).

### **How It Works**

The curriculum includes six lessons covering various countries and their cultures. Each lesson consists of background information on the country and culture, leader prep, an experiential learning activity, and a participant handout. A pre- and post-test for each lesson is included in the curriculum as well as a pre- and post-test for the entire curriculum. The curriculum will introduce 4-H members to various cultures and will serve to broaden participants' knowledge of cultural practices and terminology related to the cultures of different countries/regions (Ghana, Australia, Brazil, Ethiopia, the Mediterranean, China, Guatemala, and India).

The target population for the curriculum is youth between the ages of 11 and 12. The curriculum will specifically target youth throughout Mississippi. Extension agents with 4-H responsibilities will deliver the curriculum to their local 4-H club members and youth in the public school system as well as to other youth and partner organizations upon request.

### **Results to Date**

Thus far, preliminary studies have been conducted on all six lessons with positive feedback from every lesson. During the preliminary studies, feedback was acquired from both adults and youth who reported the lessons to be interesting, well-designed, engaging, fun, and age-appropriate. Minor suggestions were made for curriculum improvement including modifying lesson activities and providing additional options for lesson materials.

### **Future Plans**

To further evaluate the curriculum, it is recommended for the lessons to be pilot tested among 4-H agents throughout Mississippi. During the pilot tests, the leader evaluation document, leader observation form, and participant evaluation document will be used to collect qualitative data. Once the data has been collected and the curriculum has been modified as recommended, workshops promoting the curriculum will be offered at district and state conferences throughout Mississippi to generate interest among 4-H agents and volunteers.

Additionally, it is hoped that the curriculum will be approved for usage as a state-wide program by the Mississippi State University Extension Service. Extension agents will then be able to select it as part of their yearly plan of work. Contests or workshops based on the curriculum could also be developed for 4-H members to participate in at Project Achievement Day and State 4-H Congress. Furthermore, the curriculum has the potential to evolve into a national curriculum offered through the National 4-H Council.

### **Cost/Resources Needed**

The development cost for the curriculum was \$0 as it was the author's graduate project. The cost of the materials for the preliminary studies of the curriculum was approximately \$100 and paid for by the Tishomingo County 4-H Program. No funds are currently allocated for training or administrating the curriculum. Training will occur at district level meetings and state conferences. The curriculum will be published as a printable document on the Mississippi State University Extension Intranet.

## References

- American Immigration Council. (2017). *Immigrants in Mississippi*. Retrieved from [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants\\_in\\_Mississippi .pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_Mississippi.pdf)
- Garcia, E.K. (n.d.). *Multicultural education in your classroom*. Retrieved from <http://www.teachhub.com/multicultural-education-your-classroom>
- Jamison, K. (2012). Virginia Cooperative Extension guide to Virginia 4-H programming resources. Retrieved from [https://ext.vt.edu/content/dam/ext\\_vt\\_edu/topics/4h-youth/files/curriculum-resource-guide.pdf](https://ext.vt.edu/content/dam/ext_vt_edu/topics/4h-youth/files/curriculum-resource-guide.pdf)
- Kennedy, E., Bronte-Tinkew, J., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Enhancing cultural competence in out-of-school time programs: what is it, and why is it important?* Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/2007-03CulturalCompetenceOST.pdf>
- Migration Policy Institute. (n.d.). *Mississippi*. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/>
- Smith, J.O. & Pate, R.N. (2007). Cultures around the world: a unique approach to youth cultural diversity education. *Journal of Youth Development*, 2(2). Retrieved from <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/viewFile/354/340>
- Victorson, N. (2016). *Youth develop global leadership competencies through 4-H*. Retrieved from [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/youth\\_develop\\_global\\_leadership\\_competencies\\_through\\_4-h\\_part\\_6](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/youth_develop_global_leadership_competencies_through_4-h_part_6)