

Trekking for understanding: Exploring change in global perspectives

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Introduction

Diverse student populations create a need for enhanced global perspectives and cultural awareness within school-based agricultural education (SBAE). International experiences augment educators' cultural awareness and reinvigorate teachers, creating confidence and autonomy in the classroom (Sandlin, Murphrey, Lindner, & Dooley, 2013; Stephens & Little, 2008). However, agriculture teachers have few opportunities to travel internationally and little is known about how these experiences influence teachers of SBAE (Hurst, Roberts, & Harder, 2015; Thuemmel & Welton, 1983). This qualitative study sought to describe change in the global perspectives of SBAE teachers after participating in an international experience in Ecuador.

This research addressed priority five of the National Research Agenda of the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE), as teachers of SBAE communicate the message of agriculture with diverse audiences (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). Passel & Cohn (2008) estimated one in five people in the United States will be an immigrant by the year 2050. Addressing how teachers perceive the ever-changing cultural diversity in agriculture classrooms is necessary to create high quality comprehensive SBAE programs for all students.

Theoretical Framework

Providing professional development is key to improving education (Guskey, 2002). Further, professional development should be developed with the intended audience in mind (Guskey, 2002). Guskey's (2000) model of teacher change situated this study exploring professional development specifically tailored to teachers of SBAE from two western states. This model focuses on change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs as the final goal of professional development as opposed to alternative models, which suggest change in students as the ultimate objective (Guskey, 2000). The contextualization of the experience itself in combination with the teachers' environment is the focus (Boylan, Coldwell, Maxwell, & Jordan, 2018).

Methodology

This phenomenological study focused on an international experience and the perceptions of the experience as described by the SBAE teachers ($N = 6$) involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Braskamp's (2014) Global Perspectives Inventory was used to create semi-structured interview questions categorized by cognitive, intrapersonal, and social constructs. The recorded interviews took place after receiving consent from those involved and were then transcribed. Constant comparative analysis was used to look for themes and provide a metasynthesis (Saldaña, 2016). Trustworthiness necessary in qualitative research was established through ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Triangulation through multiple sources of input, member checks, and peer debriefing supported credibility, while dependability and confirmability were maintained through an audit trail kept by the lead researcher in journal form (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Thick description through direct quotations supporting emergent themes provided transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Results and Findings

Three themes emerged regarding teachers change in Global Perspectives following their international experience in Ecuador:

Theme 1: Comfort Discussing Global Perspectives

- “I think that it’s definitely made me more comfortable to talk about topics that might be a little bit more uncomfortable for people”
- “It was broadened greatly because before I had a perspective of South America that was limited to Mexico... And so now I feel like I can have a better founded conversation about some of those students having been exposed to more of South America.”
- “I feel more comfortable after going through the experience and especially sharing my culture with other people and encouraging my students to share”

Theme 2: Increase in Overall Global Awareness

- “I think it’s made. . . it more comfortable because, instead of, you know, I just know what other people live like, I’ve seen what other people live like.”
- “But I mean I think it has, like, increased my awareness of others. As far as like their backgrounds and things that they value compared to my own.”
- “And actually, experiencing that and being able to see like that is a completely different picture and it was very interesting and definitely something that I want to experience more of and be able to see more.”

Theme 3: Actively Incorporating Change with Relation to Global Perspective

- “It really makes me want to immerse more in other people’s culture and way of life, and not just walk around where maybe other people live, but to get the real experience, and get to stay with the host family”
- “Getting out and talking to people more, instead of going off hearsay, is important.”
- “I’m just more sensitive, more aware. I definitely kind of, um, take a little bit more time to consider how I’m approaching things and how I state things.”

Conclusions

Several participants mentioned the benefit of broadening global perspectives to the profession of teaching SBAE, specifically in relation to diverse student populations. Most expressed an evaluation of their advances in awareness and comfort with the topic, including those who have since actively changed their behaviors as a result. Participants appear to have shifted in perspective concerning comfort and awareness levels since the experience, consistent with Guskey’s (2002) model of teacher change and effective professional development.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

The emergent themes aligned with the constructs identified by Braskamp (2014). As high school classrooms become increasingly more diverse, it is not only beneficial for educators to become more globally competent but is also something that they are requesting for their own success with to foster intrapersonal communication with their students and others.

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