

Headed to the Fair! Leveraging Partnerships to Develop Reflective Teachers

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Introduction/Need

Experiential learning is a hallmark of school-based agricultural education (SBAE). Within teacher preparation programs, experiential learning often manifests in the form of microteaching or field experiences designed so pre-service teachers may observe and/or practice the art of teaching. Regardless how an experience is structured, without an intentional reflective component, the full impact of the experience cannot be realized (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984).

As a teacher, reflective practice is critical (Brookfield, 1995; Cruikshank, 1981). However, for pre-service teachers to develop the skills necessary to become reflective practitioners, reflection must be modeled, instruction must be provided, and opportunities to engage in reflective practice must be offered. Schon (1983) described two types of reflective practice – *reflection in action* and *reflection on action*; both are valuable for developing teachers. Reflection in action can be described as “reflecting while doing” and requires thinking on one’s feet, while reflection on action is reflection once the experience is complete (Scales, 2013).

Opportunities for pre-service SBAE teachers to experience and develop skills in both teaching and reflecting are necessary. Particularly, in Minnesota, Agricultural Education program graduates are licensed in grades 5-12, however the majority of programmatic field experiences provide opportunities within grades 7-12. As such, in 2017, this two-day teaching activity was created to provide a structured field experience through which pre-service teachers interact with students in lower grades and engage in reflection to develop skills as a reflective practitioner. This activity brings urban 5th grade classes to the State Fairgrounds and increases students’ understanding of agriculture, food, and environmental concepts. While this activity was conducted in 2017 and 2018, this poster specifically highlights the results of the 2018 iteration.

How It Works

In collaboration with State Fair staff and Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom education specialists, faculty and students from the University of Minnesota Agricultural Education, Communication and Marketing program facilitated an interactive field trip for 5th graders utilizing facilities and resources on the state fairgrounds. State Fair staff worked with Ag Ed faculty to select field trip dates (in consultation with Fall academic calendars) and recruit participating elementary schools. The opportunity was offered to participating schools at no cost.

Instructional teams of UM Agricultural Education pre-service teachers planned and delivered educational presentations to urban 5th graders. Students in an upper-level teaching methods course served as lead teachers, with assistance provided by students enrolled in a freshmen-level Orientation course. On average there were 3-4 lead teachers assisted by 4-5 students from the Orientation course. Lead teachers met with 5th grade teachers for planning early in the Fall semester, and introduced themselves to the students with whom they would interact.

Teams planned educational stations for 5th graders to experience on a rotational basis. The topics (Environment, Food, and Minnesota Ag Products) were selected with input from 5th grade

teachers. Instructional teams were responsible for designing effective, engaging instruction about agricultural concepts that addressed select academic standards. To help with planning, Agriculture in the Classroom staff presented to the methods class, sharing resources and highlighting activities, strategies, and best practices for teaching upper elementary students.

Results to Date

A total of 146 urban 5th graders learned about agricultural concepts from pre-service instructional teams. On Monday, October 15, 75 students from Highland Park experienced the educational stations. On Wednesday, October 17, a total of 71 students from St. Anthony Park received instruction. This schedule allowed instructional teams to conduct essentially the same educational experience with two different classes. The Monday/Wednesday format was intentionally planned so that teams could reflect upon and adjust teaching content or strategies.

An excellent partnership was formed among elementary schools, Minnesota State Fair, Minnesota AITC, and Ag Ed students and faculty! 5th grade students gained an understanding of the importance of agriculture and food in their own lives and its value to Minnesota. Pre-service teachers learned: a) different techniques to gain and maintain 5th graders attention, b) strategies for small group and whole class management, c) the importance of visuals to help students learn, d) assessment of student learning, and e) how to function as co-teachers. They noted the importance of reflection in action, making tweaks during instruction as needed. They reflected on action, outside of class time between Monday and Wednesday, analyzing where changes could be made to increase engagement, clarify instructions or information, or better utilize time. For some, this meant incorporating additional visuals into the presentation, while for others a shift in roles and responsibilities of instructional team members. Pre-service teachers reflected individually (in writing) and collectively (through class discussion). A feedback session with 5th grade teachers and State Fair staff identified ways the activity could be improved.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The field trip was successful and will be continued. Ideally, course meeting times will be aligned so that lead teachers and Orientation students have more time to plan collaboratively. In some cases, Orientation students were not as involved as they could have been; moving ahead, additional ways to engage both Ag Ed and Agricultural Communication and Marketing students will be developed. Instructional teams will be encouraged to consider how to maximize use of “down time” and transition time to connect with 5th grade students. Consideration will be given to how learning could be extended into the classroom following the field trip.

Costs/Resources Needed

Ag Ed faculty and students had little to no expense for this initiative, aside from the investment of time. Education specialists with the Minnesota State Fair and Minnesota AITC contributed time and assistance. State fair facilities were provided at no cost. Teaching supplies and printing (\$100-200) were also provided by the State Fair. Beyond these critical costs, the Minnesota State Fair also provided funding for transportation for the participating elementary schools (\$1100) and lunch for the Agricultural Education students (\$150).

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