

GLAGcreates: Poetry as a Medium for Food Security Education

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Introduction

Food security and related wicked problems can be a challenging area for learners at any level. (Coyne, 2005). The difficulty with learner engagement lies not only with comprehension, but also with confidence in discussing. As the world continues to become more globalized, the complexity of challenges like food security grows as well (Stripling & Ricketts, 2016). Mitigation of complex problems as it pertains to education requires many areas of expertise (Komives & Wagner, 2012) and in addition to diversified mitigation, learning contexts outside of traditional spaces will be paramount for building skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership (Batsleer, 2015; Sterling, & Huckle, 2014). Recognizing the need for building critical thinking and leadership skills, the Global Teach Ag Network at Penn State University in partnership with the non-profit group Poetry X Hunger launched GLAGcreates.

GLAGcreates is an orchestrated collection of activities piloted in 2020 with the goal of creating an instructional resource to assist secondary instructors in integrating literacy in their food security education curriculum using poetry. In addition, the program provided a platform for students to express their thoughts on hunger in a non-traditional medium. There is a need to increase diverse student confidence in the topic of food security through platforms of creativity. Many teachers believe that creativity can be developed and fostered in the classroom (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Lee & Park, 2021) and through written expression like poetry (Weems, 2003) we can make a positive impact in the pursuit of improving student success while considering diverse and challenging backgrounds the students come from (Edsource, 2015).

GLAGcreates developed a process to systematically integrate the arts and humanities into collaboration with applied STEM areas to tackle the wicked challenge of global food security by partnering with Poetry X Hunger in the development of a poetry event, an action team comprised of four educators from two different countries, and a suite of online learning modules exploring poetry to capture sentiments on the topic of hunger.

How it works

The initial goal of the pilot program was to have learners from at least two countries complete the online modules and compose an original poem by December 1, 2020. The modules were guided by UN Sustainable Development Goal #2: Zero Hunger (Desa, 2016) and led learners through content on both basic food security principles as well as basic techniques for composing poetry. The modules were reviewed by the four educators before wide distribution, representing the disciplines of English/Fine Arts and Agriscience. The module design was chosen based on the constructivist theory approach, using the teacher as a facilitator to student learning in the support role and letting the content of the modules take care of the transfer of knowledge (Gilboy et al., 2015). This in turn created a pseudo “flipped classroom” following Bloom’s Taxonomic framework where students completed the modules and checks for comprehension before progressing to the application of their knowledge (Pickard, 2007). Students concluded their experience with a project that asked them to compose an original poem and submit it for the culminating event. The project provided the context for their learning and met the educational objective of sentiment capture. (National Research Council, 2009a)

As a response to the pandemic, the instructional module was provided for the utilization of any educator at no cost to integrate into their program. To be eligible to submit entries in the culminating poetry event, the educator had to be registered in the Global Teach Ag Network professional development conference.

Results to Date

The GLAGcreates experience culminated in a poetry submission event where secondary students (N=25) from three different countries (Honduras, Malawi, and the US) completed and submitted a poem for review by a judging panel composed of two poet laureates and a food distribution specialist. The poet laureates were chosen by our collaborator from Poetry X Hunger and the food distribution specialist was chosen to bring a diversity of perspective from the food security issue lens. Poems were judged over a two-week period using a standardized rubric developed by an English/Fine Arts instructor who was a member of the GLAGcreates action team. Winners were notified during the first week of January and three students were showcased during a workshop on Zoom (N=79) during which time they explained their creative process and the role poetry will play in their lives as they continue to develop critical thinking skills.

Future Plans

With the pilot success, the poetry event will continue in 2022. In addition, other opportunities to connect the humanities and arts to applied STEM challenges will be considered as partners and capacity are built. Future programming could use mediums such as podcasts, documentaries, and artwork backed with content support in online modules. The framework for content delivery through modules coupled with non-traditional applications of the content will be preserved. This decision is supported by both literature and preliminary qualitative data as evidenced through interviews with students and educators who engaged in the programming.

Continued focus will be placed on the involvement of an action team to help deliver relevant programming that is piloted in controlled classroom setting before global dispersion and attention will be brought to the collaboration between master teachers and the Global Teach Ag Network staff to ensure that the modules are focused on relevant learning objectives. The program does present two significant opportunities for the agricultural education profession, (1) evidence for potential collaboration between educators around the world and (2) increasing the relevance of the programs of participating educators to their local institutions.

Resources Needed

Items	Notes/Description	Unit Cost	Qty.	Total
Judging Honorarium	Honorarium for each of the three judges (2 poets and a food distribution specialist) for evaluating poetry event entries.	\$250	3	\$750
Course Content Software Platform (Articulate 360)	Versatile online module software that can connect to multiple course management systems.	\$1300	1	\$1300
			Total	\$2050

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