

Developing Cultural Competence in Pre-Service Agricultural Education Teachers

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Developing cultural competence in pre-service teachers helps higher education institutions meet institutional goals of graduating individuals who can navigate cultural differences and similarities in a diverse global society. Furthermore, diversity is present in all classrooms and teachers should facilitate inclusive learning environments that promote and engage students in dialogue that allows them to learn how to communicate and relate to others from diverse backgrounds (Keengwe, 2010). At NC State University, pre-service teachers are required to enroll in a teaching diverse learners' course that focuses on teaching students with diverse needs in agricultural education. In hopes of engaging students in cross-cultural experiences, the instructors partnered with the Office of Global Engagement at NC State, who offered a developing cultural competence (DCC) certificate program that appealed to students in various disciplines and prepared students to identify their own cultural preferences while providing the tools needed to understand the preferences of others. In addition, the DCC program promoted cultural awareness in personal and professional settings and teaches students how to implement strategies for working effectively across cultural differences. For pre-service teachers, this certificate program prepared students to meet the North Carolina Student Teaching Capacity competency stating, "Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world, and appropriately uses materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledges the contributions of all cultures."

How It Works/Methodology

Agricultural education pre-service teachers enrolled in AEE 326, Teaching Diverse Learners in Agricultural Education, were provided an opportunity to complete the Global Engagement's Developing Cultural Competence Certificate Program through one in-person session (prior to COVID-19 restrictions) and two virtual sessions. AEE 326 instructors shared the DCC web page containing registration links with the students. Students were provided the opportunity to sign up for times that were outside of (course) class or they could participate in the sessions that were held during the (course) class time. The DCC program facilitators led students through discussions and activities focused on theoretical frameworks for understanding culture, cultural dimensions, and cultural competency which directly related to the objectives of the AEE 326. Because this was a certificate program open to the entire student body at NC State, pre-service teachers also engaged in discussions with students from other disciplines which allowed the pre-service teachers to gain further knowledge and additional perspectives that could be used in future classrooms. After each session, (course) students were required to submit reflections explaining how the DCC lessons and activities impacted them personally and how it could impact their future classrooms. At the end of the semester, students who completed the DCC certificate program were recognized on the university webpage. Students also were encouraged to include this certificate on their resume to foster discussion with potential employers.

Results to Date/Implications

The DCC certificate program was first launched in 2018 with 49 students. To date, twenty pre-service teachers graduated with the DCC certificate in spring 2020 and there are

seventeen pre-service teachers currently enrolled in the DCC certificate program this semester. Currently, within the total program, there are 259 students enrolled with 60 of those being NC State students. The other participating students are from partner institutions in China, Colombia, and SKEMA Business School. Students enjoyed this opportunity to learn and interact with peers in other disciplines throughout the DCC sessions. Current student teachers emphasized an increase in their confidence level and ability to work with others from different cultures. Student A said "Being able to better understand the variations in cultures, I will be better able to interpret any issues within my classroom and create a safe and supportive environment. I think this course has been important to ensure that I am prepared to handle diversity in a successful manner. It has taught me very well, and I feel prepared to face my profession. I am excited to jump in with a diverse group of students and coworkers, while doing the best that I can do." Statements like this were found in all AEE 326 student reflections highlighting the impact of the DCC sessions.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Because of the success and impacts of the DCC sessions, the certificate program is now an integral part of the AEE 326 and will remain so for future semesters. As educators continue to seek experiences for students, partnerships with various higher education agencies can maximize efforts to prepare graduates for life in a globally diverse workforce and promote inclusivity. With advanced planning and discussions, educators can collaborate with DCC facilitators to tailor and incorporate activities and lessons to specific disciplines. Next year, the DCC facilitators and (course) instructors hope to partner with international institutions to connect pre-service teachers across the globe within the same certificate program. This would allow specific scenarios tailored to education settings and hopefully foster networking relationships that could lead to partnerships within future classrooms.

Cost/Resources Needed

This is a free program sponsored by the university and open to all students. The facilitators of the DCC certificate program appreciated the support of their program by the agricultural education undergraduate degree program. AEE 326 instructors provided class time and/or "homework" time dedicated for students to complete the components of the certificate and made it a part of the students' diversity and inclusion project.

References

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