

The Lesson Plan Challenge: Student-Designed Lesson Plan Adaptations

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Introduction

Career and technology education (CTE) courses have seen an increase in the enrollment numbers of individuals with physical and learning disabilities (Cai, 2019). From 2008 to 2018, a 73 percent increase occurred in secondary education CTE courses. Meeting the needs of these students requires educators to receive specialized training in implementing the required modifications and accommodations (Malm, 2019). Agricultural educators have reported that their teacher education programs offered the most instruction on strategies like using cooperative pairs or group teaching and allowing extra or extended time (Faulkner & Baggett, 2010). These same teachers acknowledged a need for further instruction, specifically on accommodating and modifying agricultural education coursework. Giffing et al. (2010) also found agricultural educators perceive a lack of ability to accommodate these students successfully.

The Introduction to Agricultural Education course at Texas Tech University is the first required class for Agricultural Education majors but is open to all majors (State of Texas and Texas Tech University, n.d.). This course provides a brief overview of agricultural education concepts such as learning theories, pedagogy, and meeting the needs of various learning populations. Introduction to Agricultural Education sets the foundation for these concepts that will be used during advanced courses later in the degree plan. The Lesson Plan Challenge was created to address a need for a deeper understanding of accommodating and modifying lessons for special populations. This includes students under the Individuals with Disability Act (504), individual educational plans (IEP), and gifted and talent (GT) accommodations and modifications (Zirkel, 2016). The Lesson Plan Challenge aimed to help students move these concepts from theoretical understanding to real-world application.

How it works

An overview of meeting the needs of special populations through accommodations and modifications was presented over three class meetings. This overview outlined each population, their typical needs, and the standard accommodations and modifications used to address them. A base lesson plan was created to serve as the document to be modified and accommodated. The plan's objectives aligned with the course standards of the introductory level agricultural course in Texas. Utilizing content students should be familiar with allowed inexperience to not be a barrier when selecting accommodations and modifications. Three fictitious student profiles were created, each with unique learning needs. These included one 504, one IEP, and one gifted and talented student. Each profile sheet contained information about the student's name, grade, and special population category. A list of required adaptations was provided to simulate an educator's educational plan.

On day one of the challenge, students worked in groups of four to review each student profile and create a plan to address these needs in the provided lesson plan. Students documented their proposals on day two and shared their suggestions with the class. Peers were prompted to provide verbal feedback on each plan as they were presented, which led to a rich discussion. The challenge ended with a reflection assignment that allowed students to apply the information to a relevant context and describe changes they would recommend making for future iterations.

Results to date/implications

During the first and second iterations of the Lesson Plan Challenge, 93 students completed the exercise (Spring and Fall 2024). Students reflected on the challenge using a Google form. When asked to describe their experience completing the Lesson Plan Challenge, students felt participation was “very beneficial and productive” to their learning. They expressed applying the information through this activity was “fun but tough” as “a lot more went into lesson planning” than they initially thought. They expressed a newfound appreciation for educators as they “never realized just how many accommodations teachers must make daily.” Students were asked to share the benefits they perceived were gained from this experience, and most students conveyed a deeper understanding of “how to be flexible to the needs of others” both in the classroom and in a work-based environment. They also felt this task allowed for a real-world application of the concepts of equity and inclusion. One participant described developing empathy for their students as they prepared to become an educator. When asked what the most significant lesson students learned from the Lesson Plan Challenge, they listed time management, identifying student learning styles and needs, and problem-solving. Multiple students stated they gained confidence in their ability to teach special populations and create lesson plans that will benefit all of their students. Overall, 95 percent of participants recommended permanently adding the Lesson Plan Challenge to the course.

Future plans/advice to others

Texas Tech University plans to continue using the Lesson Plan Challenge in the Introduction to Agriculture course for all future course offerings. Adjustments to this assignment will be made based on student feedback. A more in-depth and individualized version of this challenge will also be added to the Methods of Teaching Agricultural Science course. Students in this course will be asked to modify and accommodate a lesson they write based on provided scenarios. Based on student feedback, it is recommended one example student profile be demonstrated for students to provide further clarity. Students also suggested smaller group sizes as they felt it was challenging to come to a decision with four collaborators. Ensure adequate time is allocated. Originally this activity was scheduled for one class meeting but was extended to provide students with time for feedback and reflection.

Costs/resources needed

The Lesson Plan Challenge requires minimal cost and resources to execute. Content on special populations and adaptations to lesson planning needs to be provided before the challenge takes place. Educators wishing to recreate this in their own courses will need to create a base lesson plan and fictitious student profiles. It is recommended multiple physical copies of both the lesson plan and student profiles be provided to participants. Students expressed the need to annotate these documents as they worked through the challenge. Creating a lesson reflection sheet is also recommended as it allows students to apply what they learned to a personalized context and express areas they felt they needed more support in.

References

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