Student Teaching Capstone Expedition

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Student Teaching Capstone Expedition (Innovative Idea)

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

At the conclusion of their field-experience, student-teachers returned to campus for finals week at the University of Idaho. During the week, the faculty and the student-teachers met to debrief and reflect on their classroom experience and to prepare for graduation. While the finals week meetings were productive, they tended to be monotonous and mundane.

In order to improve the student-teachers' attitudes and enthusiasm for their final week of their undergraduate work, the teacher educators undertook a total redesign of the finals week sessions. The teacher educators replaced the classroom reflection sessions with a three-day "Capstone Expedition" to allow for more authentic reflection and discussion of their experience, visit different secondary agriculture programs and production agriculture businesses, and discuss their future careers as high school agriculture teachers.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

The goals of the student teaching capstone journey were to:

- Utilize driving time to discuss, debrief, and reflect on their recently completed student teaching experience.
- Visit quality secondary agriculture programs in different settings (rural, urban, and suburban), with different curricular focus areas (horticulture, natural resources, fruit production, etc.) and varying student demographics (urban, non-agriculture, ethnic).
- Address program challenges for recently hired teacher candidates.

This idea grew out of the cohort approach utilized by the teacher education program. "… contemporary research suggests that learning about teaching develops through participation in a community of learners where content is encountered in contexts in which it can be applied" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, p.405). Eight programs in a neighboring state were identified by "seasoned" teachers within the state. Each program was contacted several weeks in advance and all allowed our group to tour, probe, and observe instruction. All eight programs were new to the student teachers and teacher educators. The programs greatly varied in community and school size, agricultural emphasis, and program focus.

A list of questions guided legs of the trip and were summarized and shared between the vehicles as we unloaded at the next destination.

- Instructional planning; in terms of flexibility, how was your performance affected, and did you meet the goals and objectives of your lessons/units?
- Discipline; did the students find your buttons? How did your clarity, consistency, and involvement of parents affect your discipline issues?
- What strategies worked for you to reduce disruptions and increase the FLOW of your time with your students?
- What strategies worked best for you in increasing motivation and engagement?
- What strategies worked best for you in developing rapport with students and building strong relationships with them?

- What strategies worked best for you in developing rapport with colleagues and community to build support and strong relationships?
- What were the highlights of your student teaching experience?
- Now that you've seen outstanding programs and have your student teaching experience behind you, what are the keys to building a total program?
- How do we develop a high quality program?
- How do we balance responsibilities of life and running the total program?

Assisting those student teachers who had already signed contracts identify facility and program issues that need to be addressed were priority areas for the expedition. After each visit the program's facilities and total program were discussed and the newly hired teachers' programs were considered for applying these new ideas.

Results to date/implications

After completing our inaugural capstone expedition, the teacher educators agree that it was a success, meeting their goals. The teacher candidates were appreciative of the opportunity to see another state's diverse agriculture production and for seeing such a diverse group of high quality programs. The teacher educators were encouraged to continue to stretch the future cohort's ideas of what agricultural education is and can be. The expedition provided an excellent opportunity to encounter new ideas and for the cohort to apply their learning to their new programs.

Future plans/advice to others

The teacher educators plan to rotate between neighboring states. Several of the teacher candidates were still in the job interview process during the expedition. Next year we will address the job interviewing and offering process before we load up and begin the journey.

A few teacher candidates expressed concern that they were never going to teach in the "other" state and didn't see the bigger picture of how running a highly successful program can be done other ways than what they were accustomed to. A recommendation would be to encourage the student teachers to plan the trip. This would increase participant ownership, keep engagement at a higher level, and hopefully reduce workload on teacher educators.

Costs/resources needed

The department covered the cost for vehicle rental, gas, and hotel rooms totaling roughly $700. In addition, two faculty members time were allotted for the three-day trip across neighboring Washington.

References

Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.