

Domestic Intercultural Immersion Community of Practice: Embracing the Somali Immigrant Experience in Midwestern Public Schools.



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Introduction

The intent of this domestic intercultural immersion experience is to equip participants with:

- Information about Somali culture, traditions and religion from scholarly presentations, readings, observation and interaction with Somali Americans.
- An awareness of how learners' race/ethnicity, background knowledge and experiences, culture, religion, and gender impact school environments.
- An understanding of the complexities of urban immigrants' lives and large populations of one culture in one school (i.e., high incidence population of non-native speakers).



Photo Courtesy of Mercedes Johnson

Research Questions

- To what degree did learners grow in their understandings of the Somali culture in regards to history, language, traditions and customs?
- Was the program effective and in what ways was it effective?
- Did participants show increased competencies providing appropriate and equitable educational services to students of color?
- Did the learners develop a sense of equity in public education for non-native English speakers and a willingness to advocate on behalf of non-native English speakers and their needs?
- Did participants show increased competencies providing appropriate and equitable educational services to students of color?

Methodology

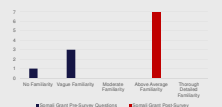
- The research participants consist of 6 Education Studies, and one Geography and Anthropology major from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
- Post-immersion experience surveys, which focused on multicultural awareness and the Somali culture were collected and analyzed.
- Group interviews and artifacts were gathered in order to provide further evidence in support of the quantitative findings.
- Data analysis was done using open-coding techniques and comparisons of pre- and post-test means.
- Data collection occurred over a 4 week period.



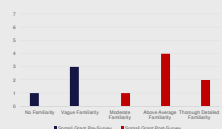
Photo courtesy of Dr. Aram deKoven

Major Findings

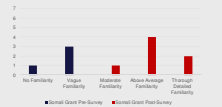
- degree of FAMILIARITY with Somali Culture (patterns of daily life, food, and/or housing)
 - "I learned that because neighbors live so close together, they often will just pop into each other's homes to ask for items or if they hear someone is sick, they go and check on them. For housing, they usually live in communities with others who know the same language and situation."



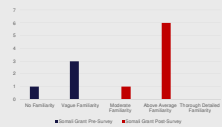
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Somali traditions and culture
 - "I learned that there is a huge sense of community within the Somalis. Everyone takes care of each other and respects one another. Women cover using a hijab but this is mainly because they choose to do so. Men are usually in higher authority but they do not completely disregard womens' voice."



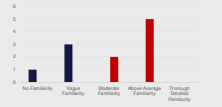
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Values prevalent in the Somali community
 - "Somali children has three sets of parents: 1. Their biological parents. 2. The parents in their Somali community. 3. Their teachers."



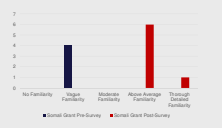
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: The roles and expectations for men and women in Somali culture
 - "Men have a lot of respect for women. Men modeling and communicating about Islam and how to pray. Most women cover but mainly up to their family."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Social and political events in Somalia currently in the past 20 years.
 - "There is a civil war between clan system. Complications over who has power of Mogadishu. The clan system relate to political, social, and geographical topics based on roots from nomadic society. Presence of the Al-Shabat has created an insecure government and war."

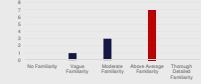


- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Reasons the Somalis left Somalia
 - "Somalis may like their country and miss it but the instability, violence, and poor economic conditions have pushed them to find refuge internationally."

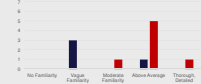


Major Findings cont.

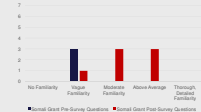
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Islamic beliefs and practices
 - "The holy book is called the Q'uran. It doesn't have the New Testament. There are 5 Doctrines of faith and five pillars of Islam. There is prayer 5 times a day and each time there is a cleansing prior."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: The challenges of being an immigrant in the US
 - "I learned about how complex this situation is... Each immigrant has a different story.. The language barriers, navigating unsaid social norms and taboos, and learning what role they are expected to take are only some universal challenges faced by immigrants in the US."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Best practices in ESL instruction
 - "It is important to include multiple modalities in the classroom. Using videos to support concepts can help greatly. It is also helpful to include images under English words in the classroom."



- After participating in this Somali Intercultural Immersion Experience, how would you rate your understanding of the impact of the way you think and act when interacting with persons of different cultural backgrounds?
 - "It's so important to be okay with being uncomfortable. That is when you'll learn the most about yourself and the people around you."



Limitations

- Due to technical difficulties, not every participant was able to complete the Somali Grant Pre-Survey questions. Therefore, there were only four total Pre-Surveys used in the data.

Implications

- Direct interpersonal and intercultural experiences contribute greatly to increased respect for cultures other than one's own. These types of programs serve to enhance participants' understanding of culture from myriad perspectives while building comfort, awareness and acceptance for other cultural patterns.
- The results of this study support the importance of providing undergraduate students with more expertly designed and facilitated domestic intercultural immersion experiences. These types of immersion experiences will help college students build multicultural awareness, competencies, and comfort while working with students from diverse backgrounds.
- Immersion program provide mirrors that help students critically reflection on their own relationship to privilege, power, and opportunity, awareness and competencies for college students.

