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

Mai Lee Kha, Faculty Mentors: Drs. Dandielle Lewis and Stephan Hill
Department of Mathematics and Department of Political Science

Introduction

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

- Information about Somali culture, traditions, and religion from scholarly presentations, readings, observation, and interactions with Somali-Americans.
- An awareness of how learners’ sociocultural background knowledge and experiences, culture, religion, and gender impact school environments.
- An understanding of the complexity of culture immigrants’ (low and large population) of one culture in one school (i.e., Somali population of Minneapolis).

My Experience

2016 marked my second year as a student-research collaborator for the Somali Domestic Intercultural Immersion Experience. For the first time, I realized that I would have to learn about Somali culture and that there was much to learn. When first entering the Somali community, I began to immerse myself in the Somali community. To me, so much of the learning that was Somali culture and culture were. I could not believe how well my experiences were. I saw myself as a resident of the Somali community. To me, so much of the learning that was Somali culture and culture were. I could not believe how well my experiences were. I saw myself as a resident of the Somali community.

Research Questions

- To what extent does culture play a role in the participants' understanding of the Somali culture?
- Did the program affect the participants’ perceptions of Somali culture?
- Did the participants show increased knowledge and awareness of Somali culture and practices?
- Did the participants 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?

Methodology

- The research consisted of 10 participants from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
- For the immersion, experience surveys, which focused on intercultural 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 qualitative data.
- Data analysis was done using open-coding techniques and comparison of pre- and post-test measures.
- Data collection occurred over 4 weeks period.

Major Findings

- Degree of Familiarity with the following topics: Social and political events in Somalia. In the 2016 data, one participant did not complete the post-survey questions. The pre and post surveys must be sent out to participants immediately after the first meeting and final week of the immersion experience respectively to avoid any impurities that can skew the data finding.

Testimonies

- What did you learn about the Somali people, culture, and the immigrants' experiences in the Twin Cities and the challenges of being an immigrant in the US today? (UNO-St Paul-Saint Paul immigration museum and the Somali community.)
- Did you have a change of understanding about Somali people, culture and Islamic beliefs after participating in SDIIE? How and in what ways?

Suggestions

- Maintaining relationships built from participating in the immersion is a must after leaving the Somali community. These relationships will extend the knowledge of the participants about Somali experiences and aid in advocating for the Somali community as well as the research.
- Teaching participants how to critically reflect on their own cultural experience is important when entering into a different culture. This will enhance perspective-taking and build awareness about multi-ethnicity.

Limitations

- Due to technical difficulties, not every participant was able to complete the Somali Grant Pre-Survey questionnaire. Therefore, there were only 9 of 10 participants used in the 2016 data and not in 2017 data.
- In 2014 data, one participant did not complete the post-survey questionnaire.

Implications

- Direct interpersonal and intercultural experiences contribute greatly to increased empathy for cultures other than one’s own. These types of programs can enhance participants’ understanding of culture from varied 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 intercultural immersion experiences. All help college student build multicultural awareness, competencies, and comfort while working with students from diverse backgrounds.

Innovation Program notes that students critically reflect on their own relationship to privilege, power, and opportunity, awareness, and competencies for college students.