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A Pilot Study in Teaching 4-H Youth Cultural Awareness, Agricultural Appreciation, and Global Agriculture through the Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain

Abstract

The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain program was developed to provide youth with an international, travel abroad experience in order to gain life skills and increased cultural awareness, agricultural appreciation, and to provide youth with a better understanding of global agriculture. This experience was developed by a team of University of Maryland Extension 4-H Educators and the Maryland State 4-H Program Leader in 2018, and was piloted with a group of 10 youth in the summer of 2019. In addition to program results being shared, further suggestions for building cultural competency at the county level are offered.

Introduction

Youth development programs, such as 4-H exchange, travel abroad, and service learning trips, are several ways in which youth can be positively affected by increasing cultural awareness, increasing appreciation of various commodities and industries, and providing opportunities for a better understanding of the concepts and importance of global agriculture.

The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain program was developed to provide youth with an international, travel abroad experience in order to develop life skills, increase cultural awareness, expand agricultural appreciation, and improve understanding of global agriculture. This experience was developed by a team of University of Maryland Extension 4-H Educators and the Maryland State 4-H Program leader in 2018, and was piloted with a group of 10 youth in the summer of 2019.

Increasing agricultural appreciation and youths' understanding of global agriculture is of utmost importance as, "Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in many places, totaling 25% or more of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in several developing countries. Engaging youth in agriculture — an available, opportunity and essential sector for growth — is critical to strengthening local food systems, feeding communities and providing gainful employment opportunities for the world's booming youth population" (Aduroja, 2021). Holz-Clause and Jost (1995) suggested, "The cultivation of agricultural interest among youth can ultimately lead to not only a more agriculturally aware society, but also a workforce to support agricultural practices that allow society to thrive".

Research Base

The Maryland State 4-H Program Leader and Maryland 4-H Extension Educators who developed this experiential program drew on the belief that the experience can transcend cultural awareness and agricultural appreciation if youth development practitioners weave in the 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2019). The 4-H Thriving Model recognizes that as a youth ages, the activities they engage in should move beyond basic learning experiences, and start to create meaningful opportunities for youth to

grow emotionally, and further enhance their cultural competencies and appreciations in the topics they find interesting, such as agriculture. As noted by Arnold, “older youth are invited to move beyond the 4-H learning experience alone to leadership and citizenship opportunities at the county, state, national, and even international level” (Arnold, 2018). This high touch, deliberate, and intentional program could possibly reduce cultural aversion for those youth who participate and increase their interest in agriculture on local, national, and international scales.

The 4-H Youth Development Program can create opportunities for youth to experience Positive Youth Development (PYD) programming which may influence their cultural awareness, agricultural appreciation, and understanding of global agriculture. Through a renowned study, entitled, “4-H Study of Positive Youth Development”, it was well demonstrated that 4-H programming positively affects children, predominantly among the five major areas of focus known as “the 5 C’s” (Lerner, Lerner, & Almerigi, 2005). Lerner et al. (2005) showed that among youth studied, 4-H members demonstrated enhanced competence, confidence, connection, caring/compassion, and character. When a program, such as The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain deliberately encompasses experiences and opportunities around cultural awareness, agricultural appreciation, and the understanding of global agriculture, youth will then demonstrate enhanced competence, connection, and compassion around the areas identified as educational outcomes for the program that has been developed and implemented.

Methods

Recruitment and Selection of Youth

Youth interested in gaining a culturally enriched agricultural experience were encouraged to apply during the spring of 2019 for the Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain pilot program. Youth between the ages of 15-18 were targeted through informational flyers and promotional materials distributed by the Maryland State

4-H Program and its local county 4-H programs as well as sharing via social media platforms. Furthermore, the opportunity was directly emailed to youth members fitting the targeted age range metric via the 4-H online enrollment system. Promotional materials advertised the intention to expand knowledge and experiences through a cultural immersion trip, with a concentration of learning about agriculture around the world.

Applications were initially screened based on a scoring rubric focused on leadership, civic engagement, and demonstration of meaningful work around diversity appreciation experiences. A total of 11 youths submitted applications. All applicants met a scoring rubric of 70+ resulting in them moving to an interview with faculty representatives of the program development team. Interview questions focused around interest in traveling abroad and learning opportunities for cultural and agricultural experiences. Ten youths were selected to participate in the trip based on their communication skills, knowledge, and willingness to experience another culture in real time and demonstrated maturity to manage themselves in diverse environments.

Youth selected for the experience were required to contribute a \$2500 per person program fee which included flight, in-country lodging and meals, and activity fees. Each participating youth received base program support of \$500 from the state 4-H program. Youth were encouraged to raise funds via local civic organizations and in concert with their club. Youth were observed to host car washes, pancake breakfasts, and fundraising dinners. Several youth received donations from civic groups aligned with the project goal such as Rotary International. Overall, the advocacy was to engage their communities in their experiences abroad to create support, advocacy, and awareness of the 4-H focus on cultural growth programming.

Pre-Trip Planning

Drawing on cultural competency as a theoretical framework for the cultural experience, the program content was developed to include learning about agricultural endeavors on a larger scale, including topics of global agriculture, influences on agricultural

production, and educational systems. Intentional exposure to cultural diversity was developed into the scheduled itinerary throughout the experience as well.

Intentional Experiences Leading to Cultural and Global Agriculture Exposure

As the pilot program was developed and implemented many factors were considered when developing the itinerary. The program featured an experiential learning opportunity at a college specializing in agriculture, which led to more in-depth conversations with the youth about educational systems and how they differ from our own in the United States. During daily reflections, questions as to why cultures have different educational systems, and government funding constructs were presented. Furthermore, open discussion was encouraged surrounding cultural expectations of youth attending college/university, and perhaps how American youth were currently being affected at their stage of life. Lastly, the youth discussed caste related systems and system influence on educational and future career opportunities.

In addition to cultural experiences, opportunities for agricultural business tours provided insight into the influence that local agriculture has on the community and its economy. During the trip youth toured and experienced a local livestock auction, rope and halter making small business, sheep farm and working herding dog demonstrations, local horse race track, and much more. During these tours youth discussed local economics, local farming practices (example - pasture management with rock walled sheep and cattle pastures), and livestock species specific industries. The dynamics of businesses staying current in today's world were heavily evident through business owner discussions. Youth learned how staying current and making connections to consumable products that may not be part of historic culture, helped save businesses. Youth also experienced first-hand how different livestock species are very important in Great Britain's culture that aren't typically as popular in the United States (sheep and the wool industry). Table 1. shows the trip itinerary.

Table 1. Trip itinerary.

July 11, 2019	Travel day from Dulles International Airport to London Heathrow on an evening flight.
July 12, 2019	Arrived in London. First experience traveling in London traffic in taxis to the hotel. Visited local parks, grocery stores and a wide variety of cuisine options.
July 13, 2019	Full day in London to immerse the group in the history and culture of the city. The group was able to explore London Tower, Thames River boat tour, London Eye, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Hyde Park and Buckingham Palace.
July 14, 2019	Travel Day. Experiences using the subway system (The Tube) and high-speed train (run by LNER) to travel to the Yorkshire region and the University of Maryland Kiplin Study Center (Figure 1).
July 15, 2019	A visit to the York City Walls started the day of embracing the historical importance city walls played in the history of York. Youth walked the wall and then were able to take in the shops before the day concluded with meeting Scout members (local youth organization). The Scouts provided a cookout and campfire; youth in both organizations were able to learn about similarities and differences between their countries (Figure 2).

July 16, 2019	<p>The day was spent at East Durham College (EDC) which provides courses in agriculture and animal care, science and management. A hands-on tour provided the 4-H participants first-hand experience of a variety of daily EDC student activities in the entomology, small animals, reptiles, equine and small ruminants departments (Figure 3). The group was provided an opportunity to help in the small ruminant facility herding sheep from pasture to the barn for health checks. The day concluded learning how the U. K. educational system differs from that in the United States.</p>
July 17, 2019	<p>Participated in a day of service by cleaning up a local walking path as part of Richmond's city efforts to continue to provide clean public recreation spaces. A tour at Richmond Castle included a first-hand exploration of the local historic architecture.</p>
July 18, 2019	<p>The day was spent in the Hawes/Dale countryside. A tour at Outhwaite Ropemakers provided an opportunity to learn how this multi-decade business has remained in business and adapted to the needs of the clientele. The group experienced a creamery by trying more than 20 types of cheese. The day ended with a sheep herding demo by a local farmer, who has won multiple herding trials. Demonstrations were given using border collies from 9 months old to 10 years old and the training techniques used.</p>

July 19, 2019	Tours at Yorkshire horse facilities provided an overview of the importance the industry plays in England, specifically in this region. Multiple horse operations were visited which showcased how facilities could vary depending on location. Youth concluded the day visiting the World of James Herriot Museum.
July 20, 2019	Travel day to Edinburgh, Scotland from Kiplin Study Center. After arriving, the group was able to visit the city's historic Scott Monument, East Street Princess Gardens and the Ross Fountain.
July 21, 2019	The day was spent on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. Youth were encouraged to view the variety of the final products produced through the textile industry.
July 22, 2019	Travel day from Edinburgh, Scotland with a connection at London Heathrow on the way to Dulles International Airport.



Figure 1. Youth visited and stayed at the Kiplin Study Center.



Figure 2. Youth participated in a community service project with a local Scouts team.



Figure 3. Youth visit East Durham College (EDC) and learn about the education system and agricultural educational opportunities.

Daily Debriefings

Youth gathered each evening for a daily debriefing to process their experiences. These discussions centered on the implications of the daily experience and how the youth's perspectives may have changed, and how their views of global agriculture had been influenced. Conversations focused on notable items in cultural experiences (language, clothing, commodities, etc.), political and educational structures, and agriculture. Program coordinators drew on a reflective learning theory approach (Sugerman et al., 2000) for the daily debriefings. This allowed for a natural flow in the conversation, and for the youth to have healthy debates on how they perceived events and experiences from the day.

Evaluation

When the trip concluded, an online survey was administered approximately 6 months after The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain. The survey that was conducted was a retrospective post-then-pre design. With this design, both before and after information is collected at the same time (Klatt & Taylor-Powell, 2005). Following the educational experience, the survey asked youth to reflect on and rate their agreement, after and before completing the program experience, to statements about cultural awareness and global agriculture. Additionally, the evaluation included a series of open-ended questions to help gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the participant's experience.

Results

The evaluation followed the guidance of the institutional Review Board for the University of Maryland. Each participant was given the opportunity to opt out of the study and consented to participate. No questions in the survey asked identifying information and the whole process of conducting this research was confidential and anonymous.

Because this experience was a pilot program, the targeted population of the survey was small, therefore, taking a census was more favorable than choosing to take a sample

(Daniel, 2012). Six of the ten youth participants on the trip responded to the survey. The survey was comprised of: 1) a series of post-then-pre items, using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, and 4 = agree) categorized to measure cultural awareness and understanding of global agriculture, and 2) a series of open-ended questions to help gain a deeper understanding of the participant's experience.

Quantitative Overview

The self-reported, retrospective post-then-pre responses reported in Table 2 show youth participation in the trip had a positive impact on the respondent's level of agreement to thirteen items about cultural awareness and global agriculture.

Table 2. Retrospective Post-then-Pre Responses to Cultural Awareness and Global Agriculture Statements, Means

Statement	Post-Trip Mean	Pre-Trip Mean	% Change
CULTURAL AWARENESS			
I am aware of global issues.	3.17	2.67	19%
I believe it is important for people to be culturally sensitive.	3.83	3.67	5%

I often think about what I have in common with other people in the world.	3.50	3.17	11%
I feel that knowledge of other cultures helps people understand their own culture.	3.83	3.67	5%
I believe that experiencing the daily lives of people in another country improves a person's attitudes about other cultures and societies.	3.83	3.50	10%
I would encourage my friends to participate in an international travel program.	3.50	3.17	11%
I feel like a citizen of the world.	2.33	2.17	8%
GLOBAL AGRICULTURE/INTERNATIONAL CAREER			
I have a general understanding of global agricultural production.	3.00	2.67	13%
I have a general understanding of global agricultural trade.	2.83	2.33	21%

I have a general understanding of international agricultural commodities.	3.17	2.67	19%
I understand the various uses of agricultural land in Great Britain.	3.17	2.50	27%
I am aware of the importance of the textile industry in Great Britain, and how it relates to their agricultural production.	3.00	2.33	29%
I have considered a career in which I would work in another country.	2.67	2.50	7%

Note: (n=6). A 4-point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, and 4 = agree) was used.

Qualitative Overview

Youth delegates were provided open ended questions to gauge their perspectives. The questions aligned with themes connected to cultural awareness and global perspectives. The following macro themes demonstrate the youths' experiences based on their responses which include: 1) becoming more global minded; 2) seeing new places; 3) experiencing a different culture; 4) increasing cultural awareness; 5) increased self-awareness and actualization; 6) influencing their future vision of traveling abroad or an international focused career; 7) increased understanding of global agriculture; and 8) application of the experience on world view.

Benefits of Travel Abroad

The respondents identified several benefits of traveling abroad. Experiencing a different culture was the most often stated benefit, as included in responses such as:

“experiencing other cultures, trying different types of food/having experiences in the context of their culture, gaining empathy for others, becoming more global minded”, “meeting new people, seeing the buildings that are popular over there, seeing the different types of government systems and experiencing and immersing ourselves in the culture of the specific country”, and “You learn the way people in other countries do things. You learn and experience a new culture. You meet so many new people to stay and connect with. You have an amazing experience to look back upon.”

Experience a New Culture

The opportunity to participate in the Great Britain Agricultural Tour provided all of the participating youth opportunities to experience a new culture. When asked if their view of the world and their life looked any differently as a result of participating in the experience, responses included “I think I am more understanding of different cultures as well as different views of education systems” and “I think of myself as a smaller influence on the world and knowing so little when I thought I knew so much before leaving.”

Global Awareness

Following the Great Britain Agricultural Tour, youth delegates were asked, “If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be? Why would you make this change?” Youth responses drew on an awareness that we can all learn from our past and general observation of an enhancement of humanity including statements such as: “Make it more in tune with the past, as in not making similar bad choices repeatedly. Because it would help us to move forward more smoothly”. Another youth’s thoughts included “I would like for people to be nicer to each other. I don’t understand why people can’t prevent a problem and just be decent human beings toward each other. I’m not

sure how I would do this, but I'm not sure how one person can do this, it's a multi-human aspect compared to a project that one person can do as an individual. This project requires everyone to work together as a whole community”.

Discussion/Recommendations

When reviewing the literature, it was noted that there is a gap in published articles in regard to 4-H-aged youth traveling abroad for high touch, short-term experiences, such as the experience presented here. The majority of published works focus on multi week exchange homestay experiences or study abroad type experiences at the high school and collegiate level. Due to limited published studies in this area, the Youth Development Professionals leading the experience recognize that while the project is a start, enhancements to the pilot program are needed to more intentionally increase self-awareness of cultural biases and the application of the knowledge in a youth's present, and adult life, and make application of the findings on a broader scale. Furthermore, the results of this single experience cannot be applied on a large scale however, as the literature is otherwise limited, it is a positive start to be more intentional about enhancing program constructs which may lead to greater cultural awareness and recognized biases.

International experiences can act as an intervention approach in order to create critical lenses that allow for more self-awareness of one's own biases. The fear of visiting places that seem extremely different from your own place of origin can foster xenophobic and ethnocentric sentiments (Agyman, 2017).

Cultural Competency within 4-H is a core intended outcome based on the National 4-H Civic Engagement Logic Model (Schillings & Fox, 2011). Trip coordinators drew on the core belief that international experiences can increase youth's life skills, empathy, and cultural competence (Arnold, 2004; Crowne, 2013).

Agyman (2017) noted that traveling outside your comfort zone and geographical location enhances your knowledge about distinct cultures. This is important when relating to others socially, especially in a place like the “melting pot” of America. Furthermore, traveling abroad can lead to uncomfortable situations which result in tremendous personal growth opportunities.

The qualitative results of the Great Britain Agricultural Tour demonstrated that the program positively affected youth while meeting the program goals of increasing cultural awareness, increasing agricultural appreciation, and providing opportunities for a better understanding of the concepts and importance of global agriculture and its effects on the world population.

Program Enhancements

The program coordinators, and authors of this paper, believe that future offerings of The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain program should expose youth to additional experiences in which they interact more with the local people while they are in Great Britain to allow for a more diversified learning opportunity. In addition to the local Scouts interaction experience, program coordinators feel the youth participants should interact with more youth programs in order to enhance their experience of perspectives within the country and the local agriculture that youth within Great Britain are involved in. Future expectations will also include advocacy that upon return youth will give a presentation at a club meeting or at the county level to share their experiences with others, and encourage youth to enter posters and displays that showcase their experience at their local county fairs. Sharing their experiences will introduce new cultures and global agriculture to a broader group of youth.

Local Practical Application

It is important to note that not every youth involved in the 4-H program will have the opportunity to experience a cultural and agricultural immersion experience such as The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain program. However, there are many opportunities at the club and county level that would help youth become more culturally

aware, increase agricultural appreciation, and provide opportunities for a better understanding of the concepts and importance of global agriculture without actually traveling internationally. Arnold (2004), found that 4-H members who hosted exchange youth gained important skills related to international understanding without having to travel abroad. Furthermore, Stitsworth (1988) found that United States youth who participated as exchange host families were more flexible, independent, sociable, and responsible compared to their peer set. For these reasons, the program team advocates for local 4-H experiences that can influence cultural understanding and decrease cultural biases.

4-H clubs and groups can also coordinate activities and events to further enhance and support the goals of the program. Examples of activities and events may include: traveling to embassies if they are within close proximity, incorporating cultural components into service learning projects or activities, and even taking youth to different locations within one community to experience different cultures and ways of life. Youth can also engage in exploring agriculture within their communities, especially within other cultures that reside in their own communities through hands-on activities during their 4-H club meetings.

Youth development educators can use curricula that engage youth in cultural and agricultural experiences without having to travel or host a delegate from another country. Youth can choose to complete a 4-H project around diversity, global citizenship, and/or culture. There are a number of National 4-H curriculum books that assist youth and adult volunteers explore global citizenship and cultural awareness. There are also many curriculum books to assist with increasing agricultural knowledge and appreciation (National 4-H Council, 2020).

Although an experience, such as The Maryland 4-H Agricultural Experience: Great Britain, is a great experience in the goals identified for those who participate in the program, other experiences can also foster an appreciation for culture and agriculture. Youth are not the sole group that benefit from these types of 4-H experiences, but 4-H youth development professionals also gain skills to improve themselves and their skills

to train adults and volunteers in the areas of creating a welcoming environment for all youth and teaching the importance of agriculture and the effect it has on our community, state, national, and international sectors. 4-H youth development educators should include exposure-focused programs as a part of their annual program development process and planning. Educators who are deliberate about including these foundational elements into their programming plans can apply the recommendations of this article as key components in their program offerings.

Closing Thoughts

Youth can continue to expand their cultural awareness, agricultural appreciation, and engage in opportunities for a better understanding of the concepts and importance of global agriculture and its effects on the world population. These experiential opportunities for youth, 4-H youth development professionals, and adult volunteers can truly give everyone an opportunity to fulfill the concluding words of the 4-H pledge, “and my WORLD”!

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