

The Impact of Tour-Based Diversity Programming on County Extension Personnel and Programs

Abstract

This article explores the effect that planning and conducting an intensive multi-day, tour-based diversity workshop can have on the professional development and Extension work of the county Extension educators involved. Survey data was collected from the county Extension educators who planned workshops throughout Idaho. Educators reported that the process of hosting the workshop led to significant advances in their professional development, strengthened relationships with underserved groups, and facilitated greater inclusiveness in Extension programming. Planning and conducting intense training programs can be an effective way to promote more tailored and appropriate Extension responses to a community's distinct issues.

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Introduction

As a Change Agent for Diversity State (Ingram, 2005), University of Idaho Extension was charged with expanding capacity within Extension to address issues of diversity. Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights was developed as a program to increase public understanding of the concerns of Idaho's constituent groups and their historical roots.

Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights was a regional 2-day traveling workshop in which participants visited sites and talked to key players engaged in issues of diversity and human rights throughout Idaho's 150-year territorial and state history. Nine different regional programs were conducted over 8 years in Idaho communities (Table 1). Evaluations showed that Idaho's Journey was a powerful experience for participants, with changes in knowledge, connections, and commitment to issues of human rights that persisted years after their Journey's conclusion. Shaklee et al. (2010) and Traver et al. (2007) offer a full discussion of those evaluations.

When an Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights workshop was developed for a region, local UI Extension county educators played a major role, reaching out to relevant organizations, arranging for speakers and visitation sites, and promoting the program among residents. Over the course of nine different Journeys, UI Extension personnel worked in collaboration with 10 government agencies, four

Native American tribes, 40 nonprofit organizations and local resources, eight Northwest universities and colleges, 33 historical sites and landmarks, 15 University of Idaho departments and offices, and 11 businesses.

Over several years, such an extensive collaborative program can have a substantial impact on the personnel who hosted the program. The present article explored the effect that planning and conducting an intensive multi-day, tour-based workshop can have on the professional development and Extension work of the county educators involved.

Table 1.
Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights: Journey Summaries

Program Date	ID Region	Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights: Program Topics and Sites
July 2005	North	Aryan Nations in Northern Idaho; Coeur d'Alene Tribal Casino; Indian Boarding Schools; Cataldo Pioneer Mission to Tribes; 1800's mine worker rights; women's suffrage
October 2005	Southwest	Chinese miners in Idaho City; Mexican Americans in Idaho 1700-1900; Idaho Hispanics today-educational and cultural issues
June 2006	East	WW II internment of Japanese-Americans at Minidoka; Shoshone-Bannock Tribe history; Idaho African-Americans; farm workers
October 2006	Southwest	Oregon trail pioneers; Basque culture; Idaho Ann Frank Human Rights Memorial; Idaho Black History Museum; today's immigrants
October 2007	North Central	Spalding pioneer settlement and tribal relationships; human rights and spirituality-Monastery at St. Gertrude; Nez Perce Tribe cultural history & wolf recovery program
June 2008	Southwest	Snake River petroglyphs & prehistoric art; ethnic images in WPA art; cultural and human rights images in art & song; immigrant and refugee challenges; power relationships
October 2009	North	Coeur d'Alene Tribal strategies for environmental protection; Kootenai Tribal sturgeon recovery; regional environmental coalitions; Federal recognition of Kootenai Tribe
October	North	Gender equity in higher education; women's suffrage;

2011	Central	disability access; Lewiston ethnic roots; Sacagawea and the Corps of Discovery; WW II Japanese-American internment in Kooskia
October 2012	South Central/East	Idaho pioneers in Chesterfield and Albion; Shoshone-Bannock Tribal practices; Fort Hall pioneer settlement; faith and community; today's immigrants and refugees; foreign born labor and Idaho's food system

Method and Results

Ten county Extension educators served as hosts for Idaho's Journey, working in partnership with area groups as they designed and conducted the program. All county Extension hosts were queried about their experiences by an email survey, including questions about the impact of the Journey on their knowledge, understanding, and Extension work. One educator host had retired, and all nine remaining educators responded to the survey.

Knowledge and Understanding

Respondents were asked five questions about how helpful the Journey was for their understanding of diversity and human rights, responding on a Likert scale (not at all helpful, somewhat helpful, very helpful). The educators found the Journey to be somewhat or very helpful in understanding the historical context of current diversity and human rights issues (8/9 respondents agreed) as well as the regional, state, national, or global context of those issues (8/9 agreed). In addition, educators found that the Journey helped them better understand the clients they work with, including their historical roots (9/9), their beliefs and practices (8/9), and the challenges they face (8/9).

Extension Work

County educators were also asked five questions about the impact of their experience as Journey host on their Extension work. Respondents unanimously reported that hosting Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights in their communities raised the visibility of UI Extension as a leader in diversity and human rights, and helped them meet community leaders and individuals concerned about diversity and human rights. All county educators also agreed that serving as Journey host strengthened their connections with under-represented community groups, and helped them develop more culturally appropriate programming. Finally, county hosts all agreed that the program helped them work effectively with Extension colleagues with backgrounds different from their own.

Extension hosts were asked to describe specific opportunities presented by the Journey. Four of the nine educators reported that the Journey opened doors to new community partners, six educators reported strengthening existing relationships with under-represented groups, and three recruited representatives of under-represented groups as stakeholders.

Educator comments (Table 2) offer insight into the experiences of county Extension Journey hosts, including an enriched understanding and awareness of local issues, providing a "framework" or

"additional lens," in the words of the educators. The Journey enabled one respondent to move from "knowledge and awareness" to "engagement with cultures other than my own." The Journey opened doors to new partners, and enabled development of culturally appropriate programming for those groups. One county educator concluded that "the Journey model would be powerful as a key component of an Extension educator's orientation to a community they are charged with serving"

Table 2.

County Hosts on the Impact of Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights

Understanding the people and communities you work with:
Intercultural interactions and hands-on learning during the Journeys have given me a richer personal and professional understanding of the people and communities I work with. Learning about the challenges and successes of human rights dealt with in the past provided a framework for relating its relevance to contemporary issues around inclusiveness.
I feel like I already had a good grasp of the diverse communities in Idaho, but I did learn to appreciate the sheer volume of diversity in Idaho. The stories I heard on the Journeys I attended and helped organize enriched me personally, and gave me a much deeper understanding of our culture as a state.
I think it has opened people's eyes to the very current struggles that some of our community members face.
It is an awesome partnership between Extension, UI academics, communities. Idaho is a very large state with pockets of unique community experiences and Idaho's Journey exposed participants to all of them.
It's helped me realize that everyone I work with has a different story; that we are not all "white," but identify with ethnicity, religion, family culture, etc. Within our communities is a broad representation of different parts of our history.
Influence on Extension work:
The intense experience of designing, developing, and facilitating a meaningful 2-day educational program for a large group has given me an additional lens to view future programs and review previous ones. I try to incorporate shared meaning and reflection opportunities into all my community development and family & consumer sciences programming now.
It gave me a broader perspective of how we can provide education to the community in a unique way.
In a way, it makes my work more complicated, since I have realized that there really is no "one size fits all" programming method.
The Journeys model took me from knowledge and awareness of diversity

challenges to the confidence to engage with cultures other than my own in teaching and program planning. I have pursued opportunities to work with limited resource college students, Benedictine nuns, military families, tribal members, low-wage earners and the elderly.

I wish I'd had my Journey experiences, both as a facilitator and participant, much earlier in my career as a community educator. I believe the Journey model would be powerful as a key component of an Extension educator's orientation to a community they are charged with serving.

Discussion

These results show that the process of organizing and delivering an ongoing tour-based diversity program strengthened UI Extension educators and their programs in several ways. Hosting a Journey brought Extension personnel into meaningful interaction with marginalized populations as programs were planned and conducted. As relationships were strengthened with underserved audiences, it became easier to serve them with effective programs. This enhanced reciprocity between Extension and constituent communities can result in more tailored and appropriate responses by Extension to a community's distinct issues.

County educators also reported that Idaho's Journey improved the functioning of their Extension offices. Working across multiple disciplines with the common purpose of designing a diversity program can improve educators' relationships with their colleagues in Extension. The educators' broadened awareness of cultural diversity further contributed to a positive work environment for colleagues of all backgrounds. Finally, the process of hosting an ongoing program in diversity training raised the visibility of UI Extension in the area of diversity and human rights, defining Extension as a resource for all community members.

Previous findings have shown that Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights is a powerful tool for participants' professional and personal development (Shaklee et al. 2010; Traver et al. 2007). The results presented here extend those findings to demonstrate the program's enduring impact on county hosts and their Extension programming.

This model of human rights education can be pursued by Extension programs throughout the country as they explore their own regional issues of human rights and diversity. The growing diversity of U.S. communities is a 21st-century challenge that Extension programs can effectively address through tour-based programs such as Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights.

References

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