

# 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 provide 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 Krista Lindemann

## Research Questions

- To what degree did learners grow in their understandings of the Somali culture in regards to history, language, traditions and customs?
- To what extent did the learners improve in their understanding of the complexities of urban immigrants' lives and large populations of one culture in one school?
- Was the program effective and in what ways was it effective?
- 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

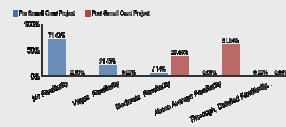
- The research participants consist of 11 Education Studies, one undecided and one Liberal Studies majors from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
- Pre- and post-immersion experience surveys, which focused on multicultural awareness and the Somali culture were collected and analyzed.
- Group interviews 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.



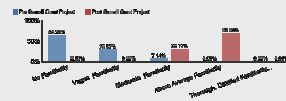
Photo courtesy of the U.S. State Department

## Major Findings

- A summary of surveys, participants' field notes, etc. revealed considerable increases in...
  - degree of FAMILIARITY with Somali Culture (patterns of daily life, food, and/or housing)
    - "Talking with some of the teachers explained the importance of education in their culture and that how well the children do in school seems to reflect on the family and they take real pride in that."



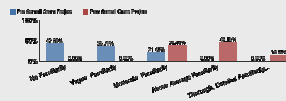
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Somali traditions and culture
  - "Not just their familial connections, but how they welcome outsiders as well. What you told us about their willingness to give guests the best is not something that is always seen in our culture."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Values prevalent in the Somali community
  - "[They] all work together, not only with [their] immediate family, but whoever else is [their] family out there." (Including the greater or larger Somali community)



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: The roles and expectations for WOMEN in Somali culture
  - "Women had more authority and responsibility than I thought they would."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Somali history
  - "European colonization of African nations superimposed values onto the Somali system and that created a lot of backlash."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Reasons the Somalis left Somalia
  - "They're here as refugees from a war torn nation, but they are still proud being Somali."

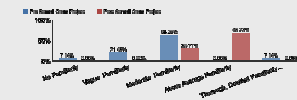


## Major Findings cont.

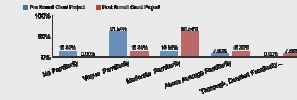
- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Islamic beliefs and practices
  - "I didn't know there were different types of Muslims. I literally thought there was just Muslim, but just like Christians have different denominations, they have different types."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: The challenges of being an immigrant in the US
  - "In some cases, cultural values have almost been tossed to the side."



- degree of FAMILIARITY with the following topics: Best practices in ESL instruction
  - "The teacher next to mine, he was the third through fifth, he had a little thing outside of his door that said this week I'm learning months and days of the week. He was trying to get interaction and changed it every week."



- How would you rate your ability to teach students from a cultural background significantly different from your own?
  - "You have to be consciously looking for it. And when you're running around as a teacher, are you going to stop and think?"
  - "You have to change the lens you're looking [through]."



## 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.



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