



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Beyond Borders: PD through Agriculturally Focused Global Engagement

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Imagine professional development (PD) that does not involve sitting under fluorescent lights, watching yet another PowerPoint presentation, and counting down the hours until lunch. Instead, envision earning professional development hours while enjoying breakfast in a rainforest, touring agricultural operations unlike anything found at home, and ending the day kayaking through a bioluminescent bay. Though it may sound like a scene from a travel magazine, these experiences are a reality for agriculture teachers participating in agriculturally focused global engagement programs.

The Concept

There is a growing need for teacher professional development experiences that are not only relevant and rigorous but also energizing and transformative (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Effective PD should reignite passion for teaching, foster a sense of purpose, and provide meaningful engagement with both content and community (Fairman et al., 2020). It must go beyond compliance-based models and instead offer opportunities that challenge educators intellectually, connect them with peers, and expand their global perspectives (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

To counter this, burnout among agricultural educators, especially those in mid- to late-career stages, is a persistent and deeply concerning issue, with many reporting significant emotional exhaustion (Croom, 2003; Norris, 2025). Traditional professional development offerings often fall short of addressing this challenge, leaving many agricultural educators with limited options for renewal, growth, or upward mobility within their discipline.

This vision led to the development of a new kind of PD, one designed to be impactful, immersive, and inspiring. This global experience was created to connect teachers nationwide and abroad, engaging them in rich cultural exchange and exploration of

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agricultural systems. At its core, this initiative has sought to reframe PD as a catalyst for professional rejuvenation and long-term career fulfillment.

Programs and Partnerships

To facilitate a meaningful, impactful, and rejuvenating professional development experience, agriculture teacher educators from various universities partnered with Experience International, a non-profit educational organization focused on global educational opportunities. The goal of the partnership and the program was to integrate cultural immersion with technical and pedagogical content enrichment, offering agricultural educators transformative learning opportunities beyond traditional PD formats.

In 2024, the program was launched, which brought agriculture teachers, primarily from California and Utah, to Puerto Rico. Since then, the program has included teachers from other states. Chosen for its accessibility (no need for a passport), rich agricultural and tropical landscapes and heritage, history and culture, agricultural education and land-grant university connection, and relationship with the United States, Puerto Rico has been a perfect destination for globally-focused agriculture teacher PD. Agriculture teacher participants immerse themselves in agricultural production (e.g., mango harvesting, cacao processing, coffee testing, pineapple cultivation), agricultural education (school visits), and engaging with professionals about relevant topics (e.g., funding resources, education, global food issues, natural resources management, resilience and innovation). Professional development is co-facilitated by Puerto Rican agricultural educators, farmers, and professionals, fostering authentic peer-to-peer exchange and collaborative learning. Cultural engagement through food, music, and dialogue fostered human connection, making the experience both successful and deeply revitalizing.

Why Ag-Focused Global Engagement Works: Voices from Participants

We have collected data from the past few years from participants engaging in these global experiences. We have interviewed the participants one to two years after their experience to determine the impact it has had on their teaching practices. Participants shared how this experience was life-changing and very impactful to them professionally and personally. One participant stated, “It wasn’t just professional development; it was personal development too.” Because of the immersive nature of this PD, participants shared how much valuable learning occurred. One participant shared, “You leave feeling like you’ve lived something, not just attended something.” Another said, “It wasn’t just a trip, it was an experience. You were learning every single day, even when you didn’t realize it.” Another participant shared, “I loved that it was hands-on. You learn by seeing, doing, and feeling. That sticks with you way more than a PowerPoint ever could.”



Our findings suggest that these agriculturally focused global experiences for agriculture teachers were highly impactful in four different ways: 1) reignited their passion for teaching, 2) broadened pedagogical and cultural perspectives, 3) cultivated a sense of community, and 4) fostered a sense of gratitude and appreciation.

Finding the Spark Again: Reigniting a Purpose and Passion for Teaching

Agriculture teacher participants found that this PD experience reignited their passion for teaching. They expressed how the experience provided them with a deep emotional and professional renewal. The participant comments highlight the reasons they became teachers, a new sense of energy and enthusiasm, and a reaffirmation of the importance of agricultural education. The global engagement experience inspired them to recommit to their roles as educators. It was not just professional development; it was professional revitalization. Here are some quotes from the participant interviews:

- “It was kind of a booster shot in my arm to remind me and re-fortify what I already knew—that people need to be educated concerning agriculture and its impact in our daily lives.”
- “I feel like I got my passion back. Like, I didn’t realize how much I needed this until I was here.”
- “It reminded me that what I do matters, that agriculture matters, and that my students need me to care about it again.”
- “It gave me the motivation to finish strong. I was ready to walk away, but now I’m thinking about what’s next instead.”
- “Sometimes you just need to step away to remember why you love what you do. This was that moment for me.”

Broadened Pedagogical and Cultural Perspectives

This experience helped participants gain a new perspective and appreciation for agricultural education in other contexts. Seeing educators and innovative producers be successful with fewer resources inspired the participants. Through this experience, participants shared how it made them reevaluate their own teaching practices, highlighting that impactful education does not require a lot of resources. They also shared how this experience broadened their perspective on agriculture to see it as a globally interconnected system. Here are some quotes from the interviews highlighting this finding:

- “If she can do it with really limited supplies, then I can do it.”
- “It helped me see that you don’t need all the fancy stuff to have a great program.”
- “It changed how I see my classroom. I came home thinking, what can I do differently with what I already have?”



- “It made me think globally—like, how what we do here connects to people across the world.”
- “It gave me perspective. I was focused on everything that’s hard about teaching, and this made me see the good again.”

Cultivating Community and Connection Among Agricultural Educators

Participants shared their joy in connecting with other agricultural educators through shared challenges and mutual support. The participants talked about a space where they felt supported as a professional community. Here are some quotes from the participants:

- “We’re just a big family. You spend five minutes with an ag teacher anywhere, and you’re connected. You’re my family, I got your back, you got my back.”
- “Professionally, I love networking. Meeting people, making those contacts, and being able to compare and glean from each other’s experiences. That was fabulous.”
- “It reminded me that no matter where you teach, we all face the same challenges—and we’re stronger together.”
- “That sense of community—that’s something I wish every ag teacher could experience.”

Fostering a Sense of Gratitude and Appreciation

A common sentiment among the participants was how the experience made them more grateful for their own program, students, support, and the opportunity to be agriculture teachers. Here are some quotes featuring this finding:

- “It made me realize how lucky I am—for my program, my students, and the support I have.”
- “Seeing how others teach with so little made me stop and appreciate what I have back home.”
- “It was humbling to see how much passion they had, even without the resources we take for granted.”
- “I left feeling grateful—for the people I met, for the students I teach, and for this profession.”

If we want agricultural education to thrive, we have to think beyond our classrooms—and sometimes, beyond our borders. The Global Agriculture Experience equips teachers with the tools, perspective, and community to keep their fire alive.



These agriculturally-focused global experiences reignite passion for teaching, broaden perspectives, build professional networks, and renew a commitment to excellence. More than traditional PD, they offer high-impact opportunities that meet both the emotional and professional needs of educators, especially those facing burnout or searching for renewed purpose. As our field continues to evolve, integrating global experiential learning into PD should be seen not as an extra, but as essential to sustaining teacher engagement, growth, and fulfillment.

If you'd like to learn more about the Puerto Rico PD opportunity or other ways to engage globally, reach out to the authors.

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