



Student Article: I-DREAM Summer Internship Experience: My Perspective – Destiny

Destiny Bowles

Keywords

Rural schools, preservice teacher internship, IDREAM grant, transformational learning

Recommended Citation

Bowles, D. (2026). I-DREAM summer internship experience: My perspective – Destiny. *Chronicle of Rural Education*, 4(1).

Introduction

My name is Destiny Bowles. I am a senior at East Central University. I am Caucasian and Native American. I grew up about 15 miles outside of Konawa in an even smaller town called Vamoosa. I got into teaching because I had a daughter at 21 years old and became extremely passionate about the importance of literature in young children. Unlike many others in this program, I do not come from a family of educators, and I am actually a first-generation college student in my family, as well as a non-traditional college student. I feel a calling to teaching, and my passion to teach children grows stronger every day. I plan to teach 1st grade, but would love to teach anywhere from kindergarten to 3rd grade. I want to be in the area where children are learning the foundational skills needed to succeed in reading.

The Students

Before starting the internship with IDREAM, my knowledge of 3rd-5th graders was minimal. I have spent time in the classroom, both in my educational classes and as a substitute teacher, but I had not had the experience of having the age groups all together in a summer camp group. The combining of grade levels in a camp forced me to think about what I know about the differences in students beyond their ages and grade levels.

While being in a classroom, you get an idea of SES (socioeconomic status). While in my eyes not very many indicators of a lower socioeconomic status were present in this particular group of young STEM camp students, I have seen it in classrooms before. It comes across in the way children may be dressed or carry themselves. Some children I have seen may not be “dressed as well” or their clothes may not be as clean. Some of these children may be clingy and want to stay at school because they are happy around their friends and at school, which makes me think maybe home life is not the happiest.

Classroom Management

Before this camp, I knew about classroom management. We learn so much about it in education classes. After being in some classrooms as a sub and an observer, you get a general idea of classroom management. I would say I knew enough to control a classroom, but not well. During this camp, I expected the students to behave much as they do toward the end of the school year. Students are still aware of procedures and policies but are more geared toward having fun and with it being summer. I did not anticipate age-gap behaviors as much as I should have; it was present, for sure. The younger 3rd graders were more apt to follow directions and procedures, whereas the 4th and 5th graders took a bit to wind down, especially when working in groups to create fun projects.

On the first day, I noticed we had a “lack” of classroom management; we expected one thing and got another. We did not establish firm guidelines for the students, and that resulted in some rowdiness and poor time management on the first day. This affected how we came in on the second day. We came in with more authority and management skills, learned from our faults on day one. This resulted in a better camp for everyone. We laid firm guidelines and rules and got our classroom management down without giving up the fun that is associated with summer camp. This experience shapes how I will practice classroom management in my classroom by showing me the importance of being firm in the beginning with my rules and guidelines, laying the foundation and structure for children to know what to expect and what is expected of them. Lesson plans may need written directions and extra activities for some students to prepare for the diverse learners in the classroom. Those additional preparations may ease the bumps in the road that may come up along the way with my classroom management.

I noticed quite a difference between the 3rd and 5th graders. The students going into 3rd grade were very eager to learn and listen. The smaller, younger group required less stern classroom management policies. In comparison, the older group required the classroom management to be put in place immediately and needed to have a standard of what was expected of them set immediately. We failed to do that on the first day, but reflected and came back on day two with more management strategies.

The Preparation

When preparing for STEM camp, we had many presentations related to classroom management and science. The one that resonated with me was Dr. Felts and Mr. Montalva. I really enjoyed learning how to use strategies to engage students in the classroom effectively. I also really enjoyed the presentation about entomology; it was very hands-on and engaging. I think many

students would find this interesting and fun. I also learned more from this presentation than from the others (which admittedly could have been my nerdy interest in bugs). Mr. Montalva also provided us with many resources and a grant that could help us in our classroom to teach children about entomology.

Multiple faculty presentations provided tools that helped us lay the foundation for the camp to go smoothly. Some were about classroom management strategies, some were about coding, and some were about resources and science in the classroom. All of these presentations were beneficial to the preparation of STEM camp; they gave me the tools I needed to efficiently teach the scientific method, engineering process, and much more to the students during STEM camp.

I was surprised about the amount of downtime students had within the lessons. I had not thought about it when planning, but noticed when teaching. Some students got done before others, which gave them time to horseplay — to be expected at a STEM camp rather than an academic classroom. While writing the lessons for STEM camp, I took into account my daughter, who is going into the 4th grade, which helped me understand the perspective of a 3rd-5th grader better. When writing lesson plans, I would think about whether this would work for my child or be interesting to her, and this helped me make developmentally appropriate activities and lessons for the STEM camp. After teaching content in this STEM camp, I will carry over into my student teaching and classroom the ability to tailor my lesson plans for everyone and account for all the downtime that may occur, including some students finishing before others. This experience will remind me to make sure my lesson plans and preparation are thorough and include something to meet all the diverse needs of every student in my classroom.

Confidence and Effectiveness in Teaching

Before camp, my confidence level in teaching was about a five out of 10. I mastered writing lesson plans during my junior year education classes. The ability to write cohesive lesson plans needed some work, and my confidence was about a three on the cohesiveness. I have taught my peers in classes, and I have had some experience in a classroom as a substitute teacher. I taught a lesson to a 1st grade group in the first semester of my junior year, but my confidence was lacking in these experiences. I felt that I could do it, but I was far from good at doing it.

During camp day one, my confidence was moderate. I knew I could handle the students and somewhat control a classroom, but I did not yet feel confident in classroom management. For this reason, the first day was a little chaotic in terms of time management and control of the classroom as a whole. We had a debrief at the end of the first day and discussed the “cheers and oh dears” after the debrief and some reflection time. I came in with more confidence on day two. The time management on day two was much better, and the classroom management really improved, as well as my confidence, which resulted in better overall performance from myself and the students. On day three, I felt very comfortable teaching the 3rd through 5th graders. By building relationships with the students, it helped us decide who they could effectively be paired with to keep the lesson moving for the group. On day four, my confidence was high and certain. I felt comfortable implementing lessons and managing the group of children. I was sad for day four to be the last day. We were beginning to form the relationships with the students that help you get

to know them as individuals and develop the classroom dynamic that is beneficial for the students and the teacher alike.

My level of confidence in teaching the lesson plans went up throughout the days. The first day, I referred to my lesson plan a lot and felt a bit lost, but on day two and as the days went on, I knew what my lesson plan was going to say. Before this STEM camp started, I did not have much confidence in teaching science lessons, but after the presentations and doing research into the activities and lessons, I had much more confidence to teach science to 3rd through 5th graders.

Getting practice teaching in the IDREAM internship has given me the confidence to work with a team to get things done in a productive manner that is beneficial to teaching students. After this experience, I see that my teaching skills have changed drastically. I now have the confidence to do my student teaching with composure and assurance that I can teach children in a manner that will be beneficial to them and me as the teacher alike.

This experience has changed how effective I feel when I teach. When I am teaching my peers in a college class, I have a hard time telling if they really learned anything new or if they are just being encouraging and supportive because it is required. The camp experience allowed me to teach 3rd through 5th graders new science concepts and conduct experiments to see how things work. I got to see their faces light up when something clicked — moments like that remind me why I got into teaching.

I feel the students did learn the majority of what I set out to teach them. A lot of them had prior knowledge and a real interest in what we were learning. We had large group discussions about why things worked, why they did not work, and how to solve those problems. The students not only answered questions correctly, but also had great, inventive solutions to fix things that had gone wrong.

My perception of teaching effectiveness was that a teacher should teach, protect, and advocate for the students in their classroom, show up for them every day, and be the solid foundation they need. Plus, they should make sure students are learning, meeting state standards, and growing as a class. I believe the students did learn what Mrs. Helm and I set out to teach; they had great answers, discussions, contributions, and ideas for every activity and experiment we did in science. My perceptions did change during camp. I realized a teacher is all of those things and much more. As a teacher, you are responsible for the children for 8 hours a day, making sure they are learning, but also being responsible, caring citizens.

Conclusion

Now that we have concluded STEM camp, I realize the effectiveness of a teacher is everything. As teachers, we see students for a very large part of the day and have a great influence on how they learn. But more than the academic part of school, teacher set boundaries for how students treat each other in an effort to build productive citizens of society. That is crucially important because we need to leave a generation of great kids for this planet. Overall, this STEM camp was amazing. It taught me how to work well with co-teachers, use teamwork to get things done, and

effectively teach children. It benefited me greatly in getting more prepared for student teaching, and while I still have my block three before I student teach, I will go into both with self-confidence and assurance that I can teach the students effectively. I am different as a teacher than I was before this experience started. Now, I have more tools in my teacher toolbox to work with and more experience under my belt to have the confidence I need to go into the classroom and teach effectively.

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Student Article

I-DREAM Summer Internship Experience: My Perspective – Sam

Sam Townsing

Keywords

Rural schools, preservice teacher internship, IDREAM grant, transformational learning

Recommended Citation

Townsing, S. (2026). I-DREAM summer internship experience: My perspective – Sam. *Chronicle of Rural Education*, 4(1).

Introduction

My name is Sam Townsing, and I am an undergrad senior in college, going into my last year as an elementary education major. I am Caucasian, and my ancestors came from Germany. I grew up in Queensland, Australia, and have lived in the United States for eight years. Three of those years in Florida and four of those years in Oklahoma. My background of being from Australia but also living here for so long and attending high school here in the States has changed the way I look at events and opportunities.

It seems random that I want to be a teacher, and I am attending East Central University out of all the states. I wanted to be a teacher because in my senior year of high school, I took a leading role in my math class to help my peers pass the class. My peers would go to me before the teacher because I would help them understand their mistakes instead of giving them the answers. This is something that I have taken and used a lot on my path to becoming a future teacher.

My background gives me an advantage in understanding students' struggles in any subject since I have a few learning disabilities, which don't stop me from being in college and passing my classes. Over the years of trying to become a teacher, I learned one key thing. Students do not hate anything just because it exists. The students normally have a bad teacher or experience with a subject, and I want to help students build foundational knowledge to help lift them in their studies. My understanding is that the foundational skills are formed from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade, so I wanted to catch them at fourth and up to help build and repair those foundational skills before they hate a subject for their life.

The Students

I have done field experience (in school observing) of the third grade a few times over the past few years. I knew that third graders could be difficult to manage well within a classroom, because of their diverse histories and backgrounds. This community has a wide variety of people of all socio-

economic backgrounds, so it is hard to know how to connect with students when only having them four days at camp.

During the camp, I noticed that each student was coming from different backgrounds, so I had to learn to address each student differently if I wanted to work with them properly. The way they behaved when they acted out showed me the different types of culture and the way they grew up. So many of the students were happy when the lunch bar was buffet style. As I was walking the students to the first activity of the day, I asked them one simple question: What was your favorite part of yesterday? Almost every single one of them answered lunch or snack. The students were at the age where they were starting to grow and needed more food. They seemed excited for unlimited food.

Overall, this experience has taught me to meet students where they are when I become a teacher, because not every student will come from the same background. I need to learn about each student's life to understand the way they see the world. If students come from a family with financial difficulties, I will need to prepare my future classroom with supplies so all students can complete activities. Having supplies provided in class removes any negative comparison between students that might embarrass those who do not have their own. Equally, providing materials will help to build a safe environment for my students.

Classroom Management

Something I always knew about classroom management before this camp was how important it was. Now that this camp has come to a close, I can confirm just how hard it is to manage a classroom. I tried my best to learn and apply what I knew to control my class and students, but I could not match my peers who have experience in classrooms or have been parents for a while, which gave them an advantage over me.

When dealing with the students in my classroom, I noticed it was much easier to control them in small groups with activities than it was with teacher-led instruction. The age of the students did not, in my opinion, matter when it came to classroom management. If the student was bored or did not want to do something, they would act up. However, if the third or fifth graders were interested and the pacing of the lesson was set up right, the students would be easy to control, no matter the age.

I love teaching math and I believe I can do it in a way that students can understand. Something I now understand from trying to control third graders is how important it is that I make math fun. However, trying to lecture or use direct instruction with 3rd-5th graders did not work. So, I changed my math instruction to teach content while balancing fun and learning at the same time.

The Preparation

Out of all the presentations, two stuck out to me. Dr. Felts' presentation taught me how to use the students' prior knowledge in a way that I had not thought about. I did not use these techniques in the camp, but I will be using them when I become a teacher. The other presentation was Dr. Tessman's lending library. That was one of the most important presentations we have done since

my peers and I used the lending library as a base for most of our lessons. Learning how to use the lending library was so much fun, and most of the technology lessons came from that day.

The presentation on UDL Universal Design for Learning helped me realize that students do not learn in the same way. Universal Design for Learning is a teaching approach that focuses on engagement, representation, and action/expression. Lesson plans might start with questions to engage students. Then, the lesson might allow students options to complete the activity in a way that lets them demonstrate their learning related to their interests. Students practiced math skills through games, but they chose which games they played.

When I was teaching my math lessons, some of the students were struggling with the concept. Through observations, I would know after the first day which students would struggle based on their current level. When those students struggled, I was able to change how I explained the lesson or go over and help that student. Going into my next semester of college, I will ensure that my lesson plans include clear student instructions and detailed steps in case of a redirect. Another aspect I want to add is a choice of activities planned at different levels to help students, no matter how much they know.

Confidence and Effectiveness in Teaching

Before the camp, my confidence in creating a lesson plan was pretty high since education classes make us practice writing them. But during the camp, I changed my entire way of thinking when it came to lesson plans. During the lessons, I learned to change the lesson based on the day before and the students' capabilities. I also learned not to be too caught up in what my lesson was trying to do and build on student capabilities. During one of my lessons, the students needed to divide a distance over time. We had not prepared them for that task, so I revised the lesson the night before to teach the same content but without the need for division.

In the past, I have had experiences with being in charge of an after-school gym and an after-school fifth-grade class, and trying to get the students to work in those situations was hard. That was the biggest difference — having my peers to learn from. Watching how each of them handled the students in real time taught me things I could not get from a textbook. Every time I am in a classroom, I get a little less rattled when something does not go as planned. On top of that, this camp pushed my confidence further than most, since it was the first time I had ever co-taught STEM content alongside people I knew — and had to actually trust them to help pull it off.

Teaching with my peers will forever be something I wish I could do going into the future, because learning all of their different ways of teaching was something I loved. Learning how your peers work and figuring out the best way to use their strengths to your advantage was needed for the camp to go smoothly. I normally try to do everything alone, but I made sure during this camp to trust my peers and lean on them for help more than I would normally.

When I become a Teacher, I want to teach third - fifth graders, so this camp was the perfect chance to get more hands-on learning experience with the grades I want to teach. However, this camp taught me the importance of managing a classroom and ensuring the lesson plans support

classroom management through engaging activities like small groups or rotating centers. I thought direct instruction was the only real way to teach math; however, I see now, after this camp, that I was not looking in the right places to make math fun and active.

My confidence level on the first day was pretty low since I was worried about being in charge of the students. However, as we went through the first day, I played the role of the time keeper and made sure everyone was staying on track. By the second day, my overall confidence had grown, though leading a lesson for the first time brought it back down a bit. However, after doing the lesson and seeing the students like it, my confidence went up a lot. The last two days, my confidence was as high as it could be for learning new things.

Throughout the IDREAM camp, I made my lessons have hidden learning objectives so the students didn't realize they were learning. However, my students were learning about shapes and how many sides they have without it dragging along. The way I know the students were learning my lessons and applying that knowledge is when it showed up in other lessons. My students used my measuring lesson in their lunch games and with the dot bots. My students also used the shapes lesson to help them when dealing with the window designs in engineering.

Before the camp, I thought an effective teacher understood the lesson and was able to just teach it. I found out during the camp that so much more went into being an effective teacher than you would think. Not only do you need to understand the lesson and be able to teach it, but you also need to be able to control your room and children while maintaining the lesson and keeping track of the students. After this camp, I now know that to be effective as a teacher, you need to be a performer for the students in such a way that they do not realize you are performing.

Conclusion

Overall, I learned so much from this wonderful experience, and my knowledge has increased when it comes to being in charge of a classroom. When dealing with the students, I have grown a lot — I came in unsure of myself as a leader, but I left feeling like I could step up and own it.

Something I have worked hard on is learning to trust my peers; this is something I have not done much of when attending my classes. As I went through my teaching program at ECU, I have learned I will be alone when teaching, and it is easier to do everything alone, so I can better perform when I become a teacher. However, from this IDREAM experience I had to entrust my peers to help me and also lean on them when needed. I'm so thankful for that.

If I had to do this experience again, I would do it in a heartbeat. Having the opportunity to teach in a controlled environment and get hands-on experience with home-built lesson plans is an amazing learning opportunity. I thank every staff member who was able to help us and was able to teach us.

Student Article

I-DREAM Summer Internship Experience: My Perspective – Sean

Sean Carmichael

Keywords

Rural schools, preservice teacher internship, IDREAM grant, transformational learning

Recommended Citation

Carmichael, S. (2026). I-DREAM summer internship experience: My perspective – Sean. *Chronicle of Rural Education*, 4(1).

Introduction

I am Sean Carmichael, a third-generation educator. This fall, I start my final semester toward a degree in History Education. After completing my degree and certification exams, I plan to teach history at the high school level. Growing up with educators as parents, school was a part of everyday life as I participated in after-school programs. While there, I found enjoyment in helping my classmates. In high school, I volunteered to mentor the fourth and fifth-grade FIRST LEGO Robotics team after school. This mentoring experience made me realize that I wanted to become a teacher. I realized that I was more invested in how excited they got when they made a connection between two topics. I especially enjoyed when they were more interested in learning something new than their robot's ranking in the competition.

Growing up, I struggled in school because I had a speech impediment. When I was in primary school, my school district had a gifted and talented program. While I was scoring at the top of my class with standardized testing, the gifted and talented sponsor believed that I would not pass the gifted and talented exam due to my speech impediment. Because of these preconceptions that the sponsor had, I was not given the chance to show that I would pass the test and excel in the gifted and talented program. Outside of that, I felt excluded from other students due to not being able to talk the same way as my classmates did.

While I still struggle with the speech impediment, I have learned ways to adapt and communicate what I want to say. This experience with a disability makes me want to be a teacher who supports students even when they struggle to get their ideas across. A part of being a teacher is making a safe and supportive environment in my classroom. That environment is especially important since I will be a high school teacher, and may be one of the last classes they take in school.

The Students

Before the camp, I had an established belief, based on my own experiences, that fourth and fifth-grade students often felt undervalued resulting in lower motivation and engagement. I expected these students to feel as if their intelligence went unrecognized. In turn, I planned lessons that

would be academically rigorous, and I fully intended for the students to step up to the challenge. Once I drew nearer to the end of the camp, I realized that the reality is far more complicated. Some students thrived with the complex tasks, but some students were capable but needed additional support.

Going forward from this experience, I will put extra effort into ensuring that there is plenty of support for the students, as well as make sure I have multiple forms of directions for students to follow to ensure that no student feels they do not belong in class. Having an organized approach for supporting and valuing student differences can help them stay actively engaged. Overall, this experience helped me feel better prepared to navigate the diverse needs of students.

Classroom Management

Growing up in a family of educators, as well as my prior experiences as a substitute teacher and mentoring of STEM-related programs, I learned that some effective classroom management techniques revolved around the proximity of both the teacher to the students and students to each other. I also went into this camp knowing that I needed to have a good relationship with the students. I had expected that for the first day, while building relationships with the students, if there was any student who would be causing issues, I would be able to resolve them by moving into a position nearer to them. This tactic had worked in the secondary classrooms I had observed, and I believed that it would work similarly with this age group; however, this action seemed to encourage the behavior rather of discouraging it.

After discovering that the way of managing classroom behavior initially did not work, I then observed my fellow interns encouraging the positive behavior and not responding to the negative behavior. I adapted that method in the second half of the day, and after doing so, I observed the classroom behavior become more positive than negative. Following this, I changed my plan of classroom management to focus more on encouraging positive behavior when I saw it, and whenever I saw kids misbehaving, I either asked them to help set a good example for others or encouraged them to try an additional challenge. The students that I had the most trouble with on the first day became some of the most well-behaved in the activities I taught on the last day.

The third through fifth-grade students at the camp were blown away by the cafeteria at East Central University, which was an all-you-can-eat buffet. The students took it as a challenge to eat more than their fill and even tried to bring chicken strips back to the class in the fanny packs that we had given them. This kind of behavior could be the result of students overdoing something they enjoy due to a lack of structure and management of their behavior, or it could indicate that the students might not be getting enough to eat at home and are saving food for later.

While I plan on teaching in a high school setting, the lessons I learned about classroom management with the third through fifth graders have given me a new perspective on how to manage a classroom. From my observations of high school classrooms, I believe implementing levels of challenges to give students who may have a harder time behaving in a classroom could both improve the behavior in the classroom as well as the accomplishment that the student would

feel from the class. I also believe that focusing on the positive actions of the students instead of the negative actions will improve the students' level of respect for the class.

Preparation for Teaching STEM

In preparation for teaching our STEM camp, we had six volunteers help us prepare by showing us possible activities we could do with the students during the camp. The presentations covered topics from how to test water's pH level to prepping insects to display and study. Additionally, we learned about a kid-targeted programming software by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology called Scratch. These presentations not only told us about the lesson but also provided us with a framework to help implement the lesson if we chose to. After going through the planned activity, many of the instructors also offered to answer questions we interns had about teaching STEM-related activities in general.

Before starting this internship, I felt nervous about lesson planning because, as a secondary education major, I had limited experience writing them. However, during the planning section of the internship, I saw the quality of my lesson plan improve through observing the variety of styles that my fellow interns used for their lesson plans. From looking at their lesson plans, I learned how to better write a lesson plan for a clearer understanding. I also saw the difference between how an active teacher built a lesson around a standard, compared to how an education student approached the same task. After creating and implementing lesson plans, I discovered that it was beneficial when designing a unit of lessons to find both standards and activities that connect through a theme so that the students gained a fuller knowledge of the subject. In the course of this internship, I also learned that the days that we had prepared extra lessons made it feel less stressful to do the activity in the designated time. I discovered that planning out time frames with my co-intern helped our lessons stay on track.

Confidence and Effectiveness in Teaching

Going into the camp, I did not have a lot of confidence in planning a cohesive lesson. As a secondary education major, I had not had much experience writing lesson plans or cohesive units, due to having fewer methods classes than the other interns. During this camp, I gained more confidence in my skills to write a cohesive unit due to working with others who have had more experience in writing lessons, as well as seeing how students made the connections between two lessons. In the past, when I had worked with students, the lessons taught were either written for me to use as a substitute, or teaching students relied more on the circumstances they were in.

During the STEM camp portion of the internship, I saw myself grow tremendously in terms of confidence and teaching. On the first day, I was nervous and wondered if I would be prepared enough to teach third through fifth graders about STEM. However, as I worked with the kids, even hearing their reactions during lesson one, it became clear to me the incredible role that the relationship between the teacher and student played in the ability of a student to learn from a lesson. On the second day, when I heard students were excited to learn math next, I felt even more confident. I knew that I was connecting with them, sharing the content well, and providing a safe learning environment. I learned that improving the relationship with my students is beneficial to their learning.

Having now had a chance to practice teaching through the STEM camp, I saw significant improvement in both my confidence and understanding of what it means to be an effective teacher. When I first started the camp, I had little confidence with both planning and leading a lesson in STEM, especially since most of my experience was in secondary history education. I was apprehensive about being able to engage third through fifth graders and was worried that I would struggle to manage the unexpected interactions that happened in a classroom environment.

Before the camp, I believed that teacher effectiveness was primarily about presenting the content well and managing behavior. I thought that as long as the students completed the task and followed directions, the lesson was effective. However, during the camp, I learned that effectiveness was more complicated than that. It was about being flexible and responsive to students, and knowing when students needed more support to internalize the lesson. For some students, challenging tasks were effective, while other students needed a support structure for success. This is an important lesson to remember, because truly effective teachers develop a learning environment that is supportive and flexible enough, but structured to the point that all students get to experience success, not just those who are already comfortable with the subject.

Following the camp, my conception of teacher effectiveness had shifted to meaning a teacher's ability to connect students to their learning in a meaningful way, to be able to differentiate instruction in an attempt to reach all kinds of learners, and to develop relationships that allow for legitimate learning. I know students were learning because I could see their engagement, their excitement, their questioning, and their ideas transferring across the lessons. I also observed how primarily positive reinforcement, coupled with structured challenges, had a positive effect on the distracted students — they not only focused and worked hard, but were genuinely engaged and motivated. For me, the camp experience increased my confidence, which had shifted how I saw relevant and meaningful experiences as I moved forward as a teacher.

Conclusion

After completing the STEM camp, I felt as if I was better prepared to go into a classroom and teach. I vastly improved my lesson writing and designing capabilities. I also learned new methods of classroom management, which I implemented to a degree of success. At the beginning of the STEM camp week, I struggled hard with time management during a lesson; however, by the end of the week, I was able to teach the lessons within our designated times efficiently. These lessons helped me gain not only the skills I needed to effectively teach in a classroom, but also the confidence needed to continue to grow in my knowledge of pedagogy.

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Student Article

I-DREAM Summer Internship Experience: My Perspective – Trinity

Trinity McKown

Keywords

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Recommended Citation

McKown, T. (2026). I-DREAM summer internship experience: My perspective – Trinity. *Chronicle of Rural Education*, 4(1).

Introduction

My name is Trinity McKown. I am entering my senior year of college at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, where I am working to graduate with a major in early childhood development and a minor in Native American studies. I am originally from Wichita, Kansas. I moved to Ada in my junior year of high school after my parents got divorced and my mom got a job with the Choctaw Nation. Moving to Ada from Wichita was a bit of a culture shock. I went from going to a very diverse school to a school that is primarily Native American and Caucasian. Another shock was how big sports are in Oklahoma; the school I attended in Wichita had no sports. If you wanted to participate in a sport, you would have to play at your neighborhood school, since Wichita has several high schools. One of the benefits of not having sports in my school was that all the money that would have gone to sports went into education. When I tell my friends in Ada about my school in Wichita, they assume it was some sort of private school, but that would not be true. The school I went to in Wichita was a public school. My school in Wichita was across town, and school started at ten till seven, so the school bus would pick me up about 6 o'clock.

When it comes to school, I have always struggled. You see, I have dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. From 2nd grade when I got diagnosed until the end of my 8th grade year, I was in remedial reading classes, and from 2nd to 6th grade, I was in remedial math classes. I felt like I was stupid for having my learning disabilities growing up because I was never in reading or math with my friends. Because of my learning disabilities, I got bullied in school by both students and teachers. That is one of the reasons I am becoming a teacher, because I know how important it is to be in a classroom where the teacher treats the students with respect. By teaching students with respect, students will feel safe and free to ask questions in class.

In Wichita, I grew up on the rough side of town. Growing up, we did not have much money. When working with students from low-income households, it is important to support their learning since students from low-income households are less likely to graduate from high school, and sometimes all a student needs to succeed is someone who believes in them.

One huge benefit of moving to Ada was that I got to learn more about my Choctaw heritage. Living in Wichita, there were not very many opportunities to learn about my Choctaw culture. So, I always felt that I did not fit into Choctaw Culture because I did not know my culture. Students need to know about their cultural background so that they have a sense of belonging.

The Students

Since I am not from Ada and did not move here until my junior year of high school, my only experience with the socioeconomic status in the Ada area was from my church. On Wednesday, my church hosts an after-school program for Latta schools. We help the kids with their homework since some of the kids' parents do not have time to help them, and we give them a snack. Within the Ada area, there are a limited number of spots in Latchkey (an after-school program), and the Chickasaw after-school program is only for Native Americans or Chickasaw employees. Many parents do not have child care for their children after school.

Many of our students were enthralled by the buffet line and were so happy that they could get unlimited food. On the first day of our STEM camp, we had a student eat too much and throw up. Also, as we cleaned after the first day, we found that several students had hidden food from lunch or snack in their fanny packs. These could indicate that the students had food insecurities within their homes. To help students with food insecurities, I have a plan to have snacks available in my classroom that they can access if they need. I will also ensure that parents are aware of any free lunch programs and community resources, such as those offered by churches.

Classroom Management

Before this camp, I thought I would be able to have basic rules in my classroom and have fun with my students. I knew I would have rules like no talking when others are talking. After this internship, I learned that I need to make my rules explicit and consistent. I believe that the students felt that some of the interns were stricter while others were not as strict. I feel that if I did this internship again, I would want to make sure that all of the other interns and I agree on what the rules and classroom standards would be. Because after this, I learned that I need to be a strict teacher, especially on the first few days of a camp. From this, I learned that I will be strict with my students, and as they show me that they can be trusted, I will pull back on some of the rules.

When I have my classroom, I will make sure that in the first few months, the rules are clear and consistent. Along with that, I will make sure that I have a consistent schedule so that the students know what to expect each day. By having clear standards and a predictable schedule, students are more likely to succeed because of that consistency. Young children are creatures of habit.

Preparation for Teaching STEM

To prepare for planning STEM lessons for camp, the other internship students and I talked about and looked up different STEM activities for 3rd to 5th grade students. Some of the activities that we found we thought would be fun to do with the students, however, they would not fit into the camp's overarching theme of energy. The activities that we did end up using were all related to energy in some way, whether that be solar, water, wind, battery, or potential energy.

As we created the curriculum for this camp, I learned how problematic the way I had been creating lessons was. When I was creating a lesson, I would start off by finding an activity I liked, then trying to figure out how that activity fits into the standards. In the past, this had worked when making lesson plans for a class I was taking, but planning a unit of instruction made my previous practice impractical. When making lesson plans for my future classroom, I will make sure that I create lesson plans by starting with the standard and then finding activities that fit into the lesson plan.

Confidence and Effectiveness in Teaching

While working with the IDREAM Internship, I built many skills in classroom management, which will help me build my confidence in teaching a class. One of the skills I learned while at this camp is that it is okay to not know the answers to your students' questions, but it is important to be knowledgeable in the subjects so that the students can understand the topic. By showing your students that you do not know all the answers, you are showing that your classroom is not just a place for them to grow, but for you to grow as well. It is still important that you know what you are teaching. When teaching, you cannot teach on the go; you have to research what you are teaching and have an outline set up for you.

If you asked me how confident I was about teaching STEM before I did this internship, I would say that I was pretty confident since I went to STEM camps when I lived in Wichita. But after the camp, I would say my confidence was high, and I had too much confidence coming into this internship. The reason I believe I had too much confidence coming into this internship was that I forgot how to explain the basics of engineering, and I forgot that kids do not know the process of creating a hypothesis or the steps in the scientific process. I learned that for an internship like this or working with kids, you need to assume they know nothing about what you are teaching. What I mean is ask the students open-ended questions so that if they do know the answer, they can explain it to their classmates, and you can gauge how much they know about the subject. When starting with a subject, let the students teach you what they know so you can see what they do and do not know. After remembering this teaching method during the internship, I felt my confidence rise, since I did not feel like I was talking above or below the students' knowledge level.

I realized that I had gotten it through my head that when introducing a topic, I need to let the students lead, so I can see what they already know. That realization has built up my confidence for teaching my future classes. When writing a lesson plan, I will also write the lesson plan like the students know nothing, so that it is low enough for the lowest students. For the more advanced students in my lesson plan, I will plan like I am teaching for the grade above them, and possibly pull in standards for the grade above. By having the students lead the discussion, I would be using inquiry-based learning.

For each of my lessons that I had planned for the camp, I planned too much. When making my lesson plans, I had originally planned to have the students learn through trial and error so they could learn what worked and what did not work. However, I ran out of time, so each student in all of my activities only got one try at their experiment. If I had known about the time problem, I would

have guided them more so that I knew that each student would experience some level of success. For example, with my sail cars, I would have told the students what stickers to use on the wheels so I could take the factor of friction created by the stickers out of play. I believed that if I did that, each group's sail cars would have moved at least a little, since I had a few groups that were disappointed because their sail cars did not move. Also, if I had more time, I would have given a mini-lesson on how sails worked, such as how sails catch the wind to move forward, since I believe some of the students did not know that fact, so they created several small sails instead of a large sail. Now I know I either need to have more time for this activity, or I need to take out some of the variables that could make their sail cars not work.

Conclusion

After doing the IDREAM summer internship program, I gained more confidence and experience working with kids, built classroom management skills, created clear and in-depth lesson plans, and gained more experience working within a team. Even in the short time I got to spend with the students, I saw how small things like sneaking food from the cafeteria could be a sign of low socioeconomic status. While completing lessons with the kids, I learned how crucial classroom management is and how, as teachers, we are not our students' friends. By getting more practice with lesson plans, I got to see how inquiry-based learning works, and I found out that inquiry-based learning is a way I want to teach in my future classroom. From my experience with teaching, I always thought it was every man for themselves but after this internship, I had seen that it is okay to ask your fellow teachers for advice. Overall, this internship was a great experience where I gained lifelong knowledge.

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Student Article

I-DREAM Summer Internship Experience: My Perspective – Yolanda

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Keywords

Rural schools, preservice teacher internship, IDREAM grant, transformational learning

Recommended Citation

Helm, Y. (2026). I-DREAM summer internship experience: My perspective – Yolanda. *Chronicle of Rural Education*, 4(1).

Introduction

I am Yolanda Helm. I served as the Graduate Intern-Curriculum Development & Day Camp Manager for the IDREAM Internship. I grew up in Wayne, Oklahoma, where I was active in band, 4-H, and youth ministry at my church. There, I was blessed to have many caring and dedicated teachers. They encouraged me to do my best, and I want to continue that legacy with my students. I have always wanted to be a teacher. I loved learning and never found school to be boring. English was a natural choice for me because I love to read and can become completely immersed in a story, deaf to nearby sounds and oblivious to the passage of time. In high school, I read every book from a classic book list posted in my school library – for fun! Reading introduced me to cultures, places, and people, while also helping me grow my vocabulary. As an English teacher, I want to encourage my students to do the same. Literacy skills are essential for success in all areas of life.

I believe most of my life experiences have led me to become a teacher. I volunteered at my church, teaching second and ninth grade sacramental preparation. I was a member of the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) at my son's elementary school, and I worked as a special education inclusion and English language learner paraprofessional for several years.

I earned my Bachelor of Arts with an English major at East Central University in 2022. After graduation, I began teaching sixth-grade ELAR as an alternatively certified teacher. I have now been teaching for three years. Originally, I expected to teach at the high school level, but when a position opened up for a sixth-grade teacher, I accepted it. Now I cannot imagine teaching a different grade. I enjoy the age group and feel privileged to participate in their learning.

The Students

I was looking forward to working with the campers and was not worried about behaviors or discipline since I have experience with 6th graders. However, what I noticed about 3rd–5th graders is that they have not yet learned how to articulate their feelings fully. I had to pay close attention to behavior that indicated frustration or confusion. Then, I could intervene as needed. It

might be answering a question, diffusing a disagreement, or simply reviewing directions for an activity. I also noticed that my instructions needed to be short and spaced out for greater understanding. I quickly learned that I needed to provide clear guidelines instead of assuming the campers already knew what to do. For example, the first day we went to lunch. The campers ate too much and for too long, and we missed recess.

By the second day, we had set rules like limiting soda to one glass, requiring a healthy meal before having dessert, and allowing only one dessert. We also gave clear time limits, so the campers would finish their meal with time for recess. I also expected that since Ada is a college town, most of our campers would have a middle-class background. This was not the case as there was a mix of campers from differing backgrounds and cultures.

Some students had prior knowledge of science and technology and were very confident using the materials. For others, this camp was their first experience with STEM activities, and they needed more support. This experience helped me understand that sometimes the best thing to do is to stop and reset. Stop when a student is frustrated. Stop when a lesson is not working. Stop when expectations are not being met. Then reset. This allows me to respond to the upset student, change the lesson, and reinforce rules and expectations. In doing so, I also model for my students how to handle difficulty or how to make changes calmly and respectfully.

Classroom Management

Classroom management is a skill that requires continued modification and practice. Before camp, I felt that my experience in the field was adequate to manage the campers effectively. I already knew that it is best to over-plan to avoid downtime for students. Students become restless when they have nothing to do. I also knew how to get the attention of my students and redirect misbehaviors. However, because it was a camp and not a classroom environment, I did not anticipate the need for the same structure I would use in the classroom. I knew students would be excited to attend and therefore would be open to the lessons.

The ages for camp attendees ranged from third grade to fifth grade. I noticed that this age did not like games that were not group-focused. During recess, we tried something new: the Mat Running Game. It is a racing game that fosters teamwork. It involves several students standing inside and walking forward as a team while keeping the mat rolling. It did not work, as the only students having fun were the ones on the mat, while the rest of the kids were bored. We decided to change the game to Nurse Tag instead, and soon the gym was filled with running, happy children. I learned that every activity must be age-appropriate. The Mat Running Game would have been fun for older students.

After working with 3rd–5th graders for a week, I realized that I had expected them to respond similarly to 6th graders. A vast difference exists between teaching this age group and teaching a sixth grader. I learned to be mindful of the age group I am teaching. I need to research their physical development and know how it impacts their learning. This will change how I embed activity into my lesson plans based on the length of their attention span and how I pace a lesson.

The Preparation

Before the STEM camp, we were exposed to several presentations from East Central University professors. Each one modeled how to introduce a topic and how to lead a lesson. Dr. Rob's presentation was science-based. She had us act out the parts of a cell. We were each assigned a role, and then we would switch parts. It was fun and silly, but I gained a greater understanding of how a cell works. I saw how impactful attaching an activity to a lesson can be. I wanted to make lesson plans that would generate that same enthusiasm and learning. I also learned from the hands-on approach modeled by Dr. Tessman. We had to manipulate the materials to figure out how they worked and why. The experience helped me to allow the students to learn as they played instead of giving them all of the information upfront.

I would often refer to the information I gained from the presentations when teaching my own lessons. During the watermill activity, we learned that the tape we had used to put the pieces together lost its stickiness when we poured water over the top. Some of the campers were frustrated that their water wheel came apart. One group kept adding tape, and they were successful in getting their wheel to work. I noticed how disappointed some of them were, and during snack time, I began asking students to give solutions for the waterwheel experiment. It was a great way to redirect the lesson to a positive one. At that moment, I remembered that the scientific method requires repeating experiments. So, I asked students if scientists had to try more than once to get positive results, and they answered, yes! The discussion turned the experience around from a failure to a success. We used their suggestions with the second group, substituting staples and thinner plates for the tape, and it worked better.

Teaching for a STEM camp is very different from teaching in a traditional classroom. The campers showed excitement and learned more when they had an activity to complete. This experience highlighted for me that children learn best through hands-on learning. I have several new methods to try in my class. I am thinking of ways I can rework lessons to be more hands-on. I also want to take my students outside on occasion. I know that a change of scenery can improve their mood and relax my students.

Confidence and Effectiveness in Teaching

Since I now have three years of teaching under my belt, I can look back and see how much I have grown. In the areas of classroom management and subject content, I feel very comfortable. However, there are areas of teaching where I feel less confident. I came into the camp very insecure about my ability to effectively write a unit and lesson plans. I just have not had very much practice.

After much preparation and anticipation, it was time to put our camp to the test. On day one, I was excited to meet our campers but also nervous. Campers were arriving at different times, and I noticed that some students were sitting with nothing to do while we directed arriving students to make a name tag and complete a puzzle piece activity. Following the schedule was difficult, and we were behind all day.

By day two, I was more comfortable with the schedule, and I was learning camper names and getting to know them. Once I had completed the first lesson, I felt more at ease. The students were engaged and excited to participate. By day three, we recognized the need for more expectations, especially at lunch, and implemented new rules. Campers had to sit with their color groups, eat healthy food first, have one glass of soda, and one dessert. The new expectations made lunchtime more organized and kept us on schedule. By day four, we were all working cohesively, helping when needed, and managing the campers effectively. It helped that we each taught activities that we felt comfortable in presenting. Understanding the content gives confidence when teaching it. The presentations and hands-on learning we did before camp were instrumental in helping me better understand the scientific and technological aspects of the activities.

Now that the camp is over and I have time to reflect, I am amazed at how much I have learned. This experience gave me more confidence as an educator. Not only did I learn new hooks (attention grabbers at the beginning of the lesson) and methodologies, but I now have a greater understanding of how units are created, how lessons should build upon each other, and how to write a lesson plan. In addition, with the experience gained as a group leader, I feel more prepared to take on additional roles at my campus.

During the camp, I believe some lessons were more effective than others. For example, I felt the plant people activity was effective. I know it is because I was confident and understood the process of photosynthesis. I was less confident in my ability to teach coding for the Dash activity. Fortunately, my co-teacher is confident in this area, and he stepped in and led the activity. One thing I learned from lesson planning is that the verb in the objective dictates what the assessment will be. This clarified exactly what I should look for to assess student comprehension. If I have effectively taught a lesson, I will see the evidence of that in my students' end products.

Conclusion

My experience as an intern for the IDREAM STEM Camp has greatly increased my confidence in my abilities as a teacher, and as a leader. Before the camp, the insecurity I felt over lesson planning, unit building, and gaps I experienced as an alternative certification teacher had negatively impacted my confidence. Through the hands-on style of learning I experienced at camp, I am now assured that I can plan a unit and the accompanying lesson plans. In addition, after seeing how effective activity-based learning is, I plan to implement more of these types of lessons in my classroom.

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