

**An Authentic Approach to Preservice Teacher SAE Instruction (Phase II)**

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### **Introduction**

Supervised agricultural experience (SAE) has been an integral component of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) since 1908, as a way to offer students a hands-on, contextual approach to complement classroom learning (Croom, 2008). Decades later, the philosophy of SAE still remains essential to the total SBAE model as reported by both teachers and students (Camp, Clarke, & Fallon, 2000). However, SAE also claims the responsibility of offering high stress and difficulty for teachers when it comes to managing implementation and supervision of student SAEs (Wilson & Moore, 2007). Preservice teachers themselves also echo their fears in regards to SAE implementation and supervision prior to entering the classroom. Johnson, Lindhardt and Stewart (1989) reported that first and second year teachers prioritized managing student SAE projects as the third most important component of their program. Stair, Warner, and Moore (2012) identified developing and managing SAE programs as a top concern of pre-service and in-service teachers, ranking higher than class preparation and time management. Out of ten agricultural teacher education programs selected for research done by McLean and Camp (2000), all ten programs were reported to have taught the topic of SAE in their teacher preparation programs. Out of these ten programs, three reported having specific classes dedicated to preparing pre-service teachers in the planning and implementation of student SAE (McLean & Camp, 2000). More recently, Rubenstein, Thoron and Estep (2014) reported that a majority of the 92 preservice teachers received instruction from at least one course, while nearly a tenth of the respondents reported no instruction on SAE within their teacher education program. Furthermore, Rubenstein (2014) recommended all agriculture teacher preparation programs engage preservice teachers in an SAE program. Therefore, the teacher preparation program at the University of [State] designed intensive and experiential SAE course work for preservice teachers.

### **How it Works**

In previous years, the utilization of a team approach to SAE program development and implementation had been utilized at the University of [State]. However, the researcher noticed a lack of full student participation due to a lack of individual investment in the SAE program. Therefore, following the previous utilization of this learning activity the instructor requested feedback from students, which led to the redevelopment of the SAE programmatic assignments.

Fourth year agricultural education preservice teachers were required to complete the Developing Community Programs in Agriculture course during the fall semester before student teaching. A main objective of this course was for the learner to be able to develop, implement and supervise SAE programs. In line with this objective, a main course project was the development and implementation of an authentic SAE program that would be conducted throughout the semester. SAE programs were developed during the first two weeks of instruction and students began keeping records through the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET) program.

To assist in the development of an SAE program, students utilize the SAE Dichotomous Key (Rubenstein & Thoron, 2012) during a regular class session. By the following class, students were required to submit an SAE topic to the instructor for

approval. Throughout the semester, students were required to engage in tasks associated with their SAE on a regular basis. Each student was required to maintain accurate and up-to-date records of their SAE program utilizing the AET program. The records were to be updated on a weekly basis and were observed by the instructor each Friday. Roughly once a month the preservice teachers engaged in an in-class discussion, where the instructor modeled appropriate in-class supervision techniques. Furthermore, students were engaged in providing peers with authentic in-class supervision during classroom instructional time. At the end of the course, students were required to create a display that reported their SAE experience. Students were given three to five minutes to describe their SAE program, the learning that occurred, modifications the student would make for future years, and how this experiences influenced their SAE philosophy. Furthermore, each student was required to complete a proficiency application most appropriate for his or her SAE topic area. On the last day of class, students engaged in reviewing other student's proficiency applications utilizing the National FFA Proficiency Rubrics.

### **Results to Date/Implication**

Anecdotal evidence collected by the investigators indicated that preservice teachers who engage in authentic SAE experiences during the teacher preparation program were better prepared to develop and implement SAE programs in middle and high school classrooms. Following the class, several student participants noted that their engagement in an SAE program during the preservice program was one of the most beneficial experiences of their college career. Preservice teachers noted they were better prepared to deal with student issues and to balance time concerns that agriculture teachers have in regards to SAE utilization. Furthermore, preservice teachers noted their participation in an SAE program reinforced the need for SAE to be an integral component in their future SBAE programs.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

When incorporating an SAE program in a preservice teacher preparation programs, the investigators recommend emphasizing the importance of SAE in the total SBAE program. Furthermore, the investigators recommend developing an expectation for all students to be engaged in an SAE during their core agricultural education coursework, thereby developing a culture for SAE in the preservice teacher preparation program. Finally, preservice teachers should engage in the SAE program as both a student and teacher. When conducting the SAE program preservice teachers engage as a student, while at other points during the course preservice teachers were expected to practice supervision skills with other students in the class.

### **Cost/Resources Needed**

There were no costs required to incorporate an authentic SAE program in the agricultural education core courses. However, the investigator recommends the utilization of the SAE Dichotomous Key as a teaching tool to assist preservice teachers in the development and implementation processes. Thus, preservice teachers have training to utilize the SAE Dichotomous Key in their future SBAE programs. Finally, an online or paper-based record keeping system must be utilized to ensure that students engage in as authentic of an experience as possible.

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