

Highlighting the Traditional Path to Teacher Certification: A Pre-Interview Experience

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Secondary school administrators are charged with identifying and hiring school-based agricultural education instructors and FFA advisors. In an era of limited supply and high demand (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017), combined with a host of pathways to certification (Camp, 2000), the hiring decision can be complex. Robinson and Baker (2013) found principals were unable to identify certification pathway based solely on a resume. To that end, the agricultural education departments at two universities worked to equip pre-service teachers with the human capital needed to distinguish their preparation and traditional pathway to certification. To facilitate skill acquisition, departments developed a semester long course to serve the last-minute needs of teacher aspirants. The mid-term component of the semester long course is the innovation featured in this abstract. Specifically, instructors provided students a pre-interview experience with school superintendents who have previously served as school-based agricultural education (SBAE) instructors and FFA Advisors.

Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) described different perspectives teacher education programs had on preparing teacher aspirants for the classroom. Teacher aspirants complete a diverse set of experiences and coursework designed to help prepare them to be agricultural educators. Roberts and Dyer (2004) suggested agricultural teacher candidates receive additional coursework or experiences focusing on the development of personal qualities. Furthermore, students come to “each new task or problem [with] a set of skills, performance standards, and values” (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976, p. 73). To ensure teacher aspirants are equipped for success, the departments developed a mid-term seminar that takes place during the student teaching internship, with a focus on preparing students for future SBAE jobs. A highlight of the seminar was a simulated interview with a school superintendent. According to Bandura (1986) “the aspect of self-efficacy that is most germane to how much is accomplished is people’s perceived perseverant capabilities” (p. 371). Lent, Brown, & Hackett (2000) identified multiple barriers and variables to obtaining a chosen career, some within ones’ control, and others that are uncontrollable. Allowing students to experience a simulated interview with school principals and superintendents allows for better performance and self-efficacy when the time comes for an actual interview. In addition, aspirants are encouraged to maximize what is within their control i.e., highlighting pre-clinical and clinical experiences on the resume. Notations, such as theses combined with purposeful cover letters serve to differentiate a traditional path via an agricultural education teacher preparation program versus many of the alternative pathways that Camp (2000) identifies in the supply and demand of school-based agricultural education teachers.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

To better prepare teacher aspirants to highlight the traditional pathway to certification, instructors taught a session focused on Resume Development prior to the student teaching internship. The session specifically tailored the resume to fit a school-based agricultural education program. Student teachers were instructed to include information featuring high school attended and pre-clinical teaching experience so the resume would reflect requirements unique to traditional entry into the profession. These resumes, along with a professional photo of each teacher candidate, are featured on agricultural education departmental student teaching websites.

School superintendents with personal experience as a school based agricultural educator offered their insight and expertise regarding resume development and interview tips. Administrators interviewed teacher candidates and provided feedback on the resume and candidate interview performance. Prior to the mid-term seminar, teacher aspirants were provided a job description and assigned a school to research. The research is to result in the development of a cover letter that can be shared with the superintendent of the assigned school during the pre-interview experience.

Results to Date/Implications

Upon completion of their service conducting interviews, the superintendents were asked to reflect upon and evaluate their experiences. They considered the activity to be beneficial to student teachers and considered it to be an appropriate activity in preparing students for entry into the career of teaching school-based agricultural education. Student teachers who participated concurred. One student commented, “I appreciated having the opportunity to speak to an actual school administrator who understood the intricacies of agricultural education and how that program should fit within the overall district program” (Personal Communication, October 15, 2017). School administrators found value in the opportunity as a way to “try out” different questions for use in future job interviews (Personal Communication, February 20, 2015). This feedback supports the practice of informing and training school administrators to recognize the difference between certification pathways when reviewing resumes (Robinson & Baker, 2013).

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The departments will continue the mid-term seminar for pre-service teachers prior to entering the profession. Teacher educators should seek out school administrators who have service as a school-based agricultural educator. The perspective can provide valuable insight to teacher aspirants as they prepare for entry into the career of teaching agricultural education. Expanding the time frame for the interview process and coaching from the superintendents and administrators would offer even more benefit. One participant reflected, “I would say that the one downfall to the mock interview was the time that was allotted” (Personal Communication, October 20, 2017). This comment aligns with another student who said, “Twenty minutes was way too short of a time. He [the interviewer] felt rushed. I felt rushed, and it just felt a little hard to get what all he wanted to ask me” (Personal Communication, October 17, 2017).

Costs/Resources Needed

This activity is a component of a 3-credit hour course required for pre-service teachers’ enrollment during the student teaching semester. Students are responsible for the cost associated with the course and university fees. A meal was provided so administrators and students could continue to discuss employment strategies. True to the college experience, pizza for 20 people was served at a cost of \$150.00. The school principals and superintendents donate their time as service to the department.

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