

**Reframing Early Field Experiences: Use of Participant-Generated Photos to Facilitate  
Social Reflection among Preservice Agricultural Education Teachers**

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## **Reframing Early Field Experiences: Use of Participant-Generated Photos to Facilitate Social Reflection among Preservice Agricultural Education Teachers**

### **Introduction**

In this modern era of teacher education, agricultural education programs commonly promote meaningful experiential learning as well as opportunities for preservice teachers to reexamine such experiences through critical reflection (Epler, Drape, Broyles, Rudd, 2013). Reflection on an experience is necessary because it allows preservice teachers to more fully understand concepts and ponder how it relates to their existing knowledge (Epler et al., 2013; Rodgers, 2002). For example, reflection can help preservice teachers ascribe meaning to their experiences, and, in turn, consider the ways in which the experience might influence them in their future career (Epler et al., 2013; Loughran, 2002). As a consequence, the use of reflection has been advanced as a best practice in the literature focused on teacher preparation (Fendler, 2003; Robinson & Rousseau, 2018). Nevertheless, researchers have recently advocated for social, or collaborative, reflection to help cohorts make meaning of their shared beliefs, concerns, and worldviews better. One common way to facilitate collaborative reflection is through group discussion by which preservice teachers compare and contrast their experiences, which assists them in refining their views on teaching and learning (Epler et al., 2013; Martin & Double, 1998). More recently, however, Gray, Downey, Jones, Truong, Hall, and Power (2018) advocated for the use of salient images generated by participants, a notion called photo elicitation, to encourage even more powerful reflective sessions.

Photo elicitation – including its variants such as photo-interviewing, photovoice, and photo feedback – involve the use of a photograph as a way to elicit powerful discussion on an issue or problem (Gray et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2002). As a consequence, photo elicitation is useful as a way to help preservice teachers make sense of their field-based experiences (Gray et al., 2018). In particular, the use of participant-generated images is more likely to conjure specific memories and deeper retrospection (Gray et al., 2018). For example, if the photographer of an image is included in the discussion, they are able to provide a more detailed explanation of why they captured it, which usually spurs rich discussion because the photographer may assign meaning to the image differently than others (Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012). As a result, the use of participant-generated photos can foster discussion (Harper, 2002), introduce unanticipated topics (Robinson & Rousseau, 2018), and create deeper understanding (Gray et al., 2018).

### **How It Works**

Each fall, the *Foundations of Agricultural Education* course at Louisiana State University requires students to engage in an early field experience (EFE) in which the students observe, document, and reflect on their time shadowing two agricultural education teachers for a minimum of 10 instructional hours. As a part of this experience, in Fall 2018 students were asked to complete a report that included four photographs they captured in the field. Therefore, each student submitted four photographs and captions that represented their: (a) biggest takeaway, (b) classroom and laboratory teaching concerns, (c) Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) concerns, and (d) FFA concerns they encountered during their EFE. Using their own unique photographs, the students then provided written reflections to the following questions:

1. Why does this photo represent your biggest concern in regard to [specific topic]?
2. What are some ways that you plan to reduce your concerns about this particular issue before becoming an educator?

After each student submitted individual reports, the class met for a focus group session as a way to stimulate deeper reflection on their EFEs. During the focus group session, the students were shown a total of nine student submitted photographs and accompanying written reflections using a projector. Participants were then asked to describe (a) what the photograph depicted, and (b) why it represented a concern they had about teaching in SBAE. During this phase, we encouraged the other participants to respond by sharing similar or divergent perspectives and experiences. We also asked participants to reflect critically on ways they could address such concerns as they progressed in their teacher preparation training. Occasionally, however, the discussion would pause and we restart the conversation by posing a probing question. The focus group lasted for two hours and was captured using a Sony® video recorder. Throughout the exercise, we took fieldnotes to record key interactions between participants as well as critical moments in which they exchanged visceral responses.

### **Results**

In total, nine students participated in the focus group discussion with one facilitator and one individual acting as a videographer. After analysis of the video file and transcript of the focus group, instances of both individual and collaborative reflection emerged. For instance, students offered unique views that helped co-construct meaning about their shared teaching concerns. Often, the photograph prompted a personal story or related connection. For example, in regard to a photograph of a banner, one student said “This is a huge thing (i.e., concern) that resonates with me...” However, in some cases, photographs inspired differing views, which allowed for rich discussion about differences of opinion. In response to the participant quoted above, another student talked about how her chapter was a “big winning chapter” where it was more important to “go get that first place banner, dude.” In this instance, there was a diverging viewpoint that resulted in two distinct perspectives of the same photograph.

### **Advice to Others**

Incorporating group discussion guided by participant-generated photo elicitation into a class with reflection can add depth to the students’ individual and collaborative reflective practices. However, before incorporating such a practice, we offer three recommendations:

1. Carefully consider which topics and photographs to include in the assignment requirements. Further, purposefully select a powerful range of participant-submitted images to foster deeper critical reflection.
2. Consider how long your EFE will be and limit the number of photographs to be discussed accordingly.
3. Prepare a variety of questions – both direct and general – to prepare prompts to ensure the discussion flows naturally.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

The costs and resources involved with this innovative idea were minimal. Overall, photography/camera costs were negated by the fact that all preservice teachers had access to a cellular device that could take photographs. The main resources required included an appropriate location for the focus group, projector, and video recorder. In this case, the selected location had two – appropriate location and projector – of three abovementioned elements.

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