

**Filling the Gap: A Case Study of an Emergency Certified Oklahoma SBAE Teacher**

**Jessica M. Toombs**

Oklahoma State University  
458 Agriculture Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
jessica.toombs@okstate.edu

**Dr. Rebecca Mott**

University of Missouri  
123 Gentry Hall  
Columbia, MO  
mottr@missouri.edu

**Dr. Robert Terry, Jr.**

Oklahoma State University  
449 Agriculture Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
rob.terry@okstate.edu

## **Introduction**

The insufficient supply of certified school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers has prompted school administrators to hire alternatively or emergency certified (EC) teachers to fill the gap (Rocca & Washburn, 2006). From 2014 to 2017, the number of new alternatively or EC SBAE teachers rose by more than 150% nationwide (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2015; Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2018). Oklahoma is not immune to this growing national problem. More than 3,000 emergency certifications were granted in the 2018-2019 school year (Eger, 2019), of which 14 taught SBAE (NAAE, 2018). This influx of individuals who did not complete the traditional teacher preparation program creates a void of information for administrators, state staff, and teacher educators needed to provide adequate teacher support and professional development (Roberts & Dyer, 2004).

Induction-year teachers require specific and unique support (Katz, 1972). EC teachers, while facing many of the same obstacles, may not possess the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of their traditionally certified counterparts (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). The purpose of this case study was to describe the professional development needs of an EC SBAE teacher in Oklahoma using qualitative methods. How does an EC SBAE teacher in Oklahoma navigate the challenges of classroom instruction during the induction-year? This overarching central question provided direction for the study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework was necessary to provide an operational definition of the somewhat ambiguous concept of effective teaching. Rosenshine and Furst's (1971) meta-analysis of teacher behavior correlated with student performance served to define effective teaching practices. This study utilized the top five characteristics of the 15 behaviors identified by Rosenshine and Furst (1971). The traits of clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-orientated, and opportunity to learn criterion material have been shown to be a reliable and valid method of assessing the effectiveness of instruction (Aschenbrenner, Terry, & Torres, 2010).

## **Methodology**

An exploratory, single case study design was chosen to answer the research questions in this study as this model "identif(ies) research questions or procedures to be used in a subsequent research study" (Yin, 2014, p. 238). The bounded case in this context was defined as individual EC SBAE teachers who began their teaching careers in Oklahoma during the 2019-2020 school year. Ms. Abbott, a pseudonym, was eager to participate. Ms. Abbott served as the agricultural education instructor and FFA advisor for McDonald Public Schools, also a pseudonym. Data were collected by the lead author through two semi-structured interviews, an observation of classroom instruction, and school district information available through the Department of Education website. Multiple forms of data ensure construct validity (Yin, 2014). An interview protocol was developed and audited for clarity and ethical considerations by an agricultural education faculty member. An observation of Ms. Abbott's eighth grade Agriscience Explorations class added additional data to triangulate findings. School district profiles available from the Department of Education's Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (OEQA) provided valuable context data. Interview transcripts and polished fieldnotes were analyzed to develop codes and themes using constant comparative analysis (Fram, 2013). It is important to note the limitations of this study. The observational data are representative of one class period. Student and teacher behavior may have been influenced by the unusual school week that contained parent-teacher conferences and fall break.

### Findings

Two themes emerged from the data. The *case context theme* provided necessary context to the site visit and included characteristics belonging to both the teacher and school district. Ms. Abbott has an extensive personal background in agriculture and SBAE. Ms. Abbott identified a passion agriculture, agricultural communications, leadership, and animal science, which led to a bachelor and master's degree in an agricultural field. McDonald, Oklahoma was home to more than 12,000 people. District reports publicly available through the State Department of Education stated McDonald High School enrolled nearly 600 students, with over 60% qualifying for free or reduced lunches. Both of these statistics were slightly higher than state average. The SBAE program has employed a different teacher for each of the past seven years. At the time of data collection, Ms. Abbott had been employed about three months as the SBAE teacher in the McDonald School District. Ms. Abbott stated she “really like(s) it here” and the “(administrators) are really supportive.”

The *classroom instruction* theme identified example of Rosenshine and Furst's (1972) top five characteristics in Ms. Abbott's instruction. Ms. Abbott was clear in her instructions and organization of unit topics. She described a variety of instructional strategies. Her business-like behavior led to a task-orientated classroom void of student cell phones and outside distractors.. Ms. Abbott displayed a lack of enthusiasm for both the 8<sup>th</sup> grade course and students. She mentioned this class is her least favorite to teach as “they are probably still my worst class as far as how they act” and “most days are a waste of time to drive all the way to the middle school for four students.” Ms. Abbott failed to give students an opportunity to learn the criterion material of the observed ice cream making activity. No scientific content was included in the lesson. Students were passive learners throughout the class period. Ms. Abbott identified classroom management as her greatest struggle regarding classroom instruction. Ms. Abbott remarked on the socioeconomic differences between students on several occasions, “The kids are very different from what I expected.” The observed class period displayed some lack of instructional planning. Ms. Abbott left the classroom for 21 minutes to retrieve a vital ingredient, losing nearly half the class period to this oversight.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Ms. Abbott requires training in enthusiasm and opportunity to learn criterion material. Her lack of enthusiasm may contribute to the low student engagement and occurrence of disruptive behavior in eight grade students as described by Ms. Abbott (Rosenshins & Furst, 1971). The lesson observed necessitated instruction in the scientific principles present in the process of producing ice cream. Without this cross-curricular application, the students learned only that agitating very cold milk will make ice cream but did not understand the molecular changes that occurred. Ms. Abbott seemed to be ignorant of this weakness in her lesson. Ms. Abbott seemed to struggle more with understanding student characteristics, teaching in the agricultural mechanics laboratory, and building positive relationships with students than other induction-year teachers with traditional or alternative certifications (Garton & Chung, 1996). The unique setting of McDonald High School produced student circumstances Ms. Abbott was not prepared to handle. Consultation in teaching students from diverse ethnicities and poverty circumstances would allow Ms. Abbott to better relate to her students and therefore build a productive relationship to positively impact their learning (Battey, 2013). Unique professional development is needed for Oklahoma EC SBAE teachers. A multiple case study with multiple site visits to each case should be used to develop a needs assessment.

## References

- Aschenbrener, M. S., Terry, R. Jr., & Torres, R. M. (2010). Creative and effective teaching behaviors of university instructors as perceived by students. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 51*(3), 64-75. doi:10.5032/jae.2010.03064
- Battey, D. (2013). "Good" mathematics teaching for students of color and those in poverty: The importance of relational interactions within instruction. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 82*, 125-144. doi:10.1007/s10649-012-9412-z
- Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D. J., Gatlin, S. J., & Heilin, J. V. (2005). Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and teacher effectiveness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13*(42), 1-48.
- Eger, A. (2019, July 29). Teacher shortage: State to begin crackdown on emergency certifications for nonaccredited teachers. *Tulsa World*. Retrieved from <https://www.tulsaworld.com>
- Foster, D. D., Lawver, R. G., & Smith, A. R. (2015). *National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, 2014 Executive Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.naae.org/teachag/NSD%20ES%20Final%20March%202015%20.pdf>
- Fram, S. M. (2013). The constant comparative analysis method outside of grounded theory. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(1), 1-25. Retrieved from [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss1/1/?utm\\_source=nsuworks.nova.edu%252Ftqr%252Fvol18%252Fiss1%252F1&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss1/1/?utm_source=nsuworks.nova.edu%252Ftqr%252Fvol18%252Fiss1%252F1&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)
- Garton, B. L., & Chung, N. (1996). The inservice needs of beginning teachers of agriculture as perceived by beginning teachers, teacher educators, and state supervisors. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 37*(3), 52-58. doi:10.5032/jae.1996.03052
- Katz, L. G. (1972). Developmental stages of preschool teachers. (OEC-0-70-2623). Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Communication. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED057922). Retrieved from EBSCOHost ERIC database
- National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). (2018). *Oklahoma Agriculture Teacher Supply and Demand Profile*. Retrieved from <https://www.naae.org/teachag/2018%20Oklahoma%20.pdf>
- Roberts, T. G., & Dyer, J. E. (2004). Inservice needs of traditionally and alternatively certified agriculture teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 45*(4), 57-70. doi:10.5032/jae.2004.04057
- Rocca, S. J., & Washburn, S. G. (2006). Comparison of teacher efficacy among traditionally and alternatively certified agriculture teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 47*(3), 58-69. doi:10.5032/jae.2006.03058
- Rosenshine, B., & Furst, N. (1971). Research on teacher performance criteria. In B. O. Smith (Ed.), *Research in Teacher Education: A Symposium* (pp. 37-72). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Smith, A. R., Lawver, R. G., & Foster, D. D. (2018). *National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, 2017 Executive Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.naae.org/teachag/NSD2017Summary.pdf>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.