

**A New Approach to Field Observations During COVID-19**

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### **Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea**

Early field experiences have been identified as an important component of coursework in agricultural education teacher preparation programs (Smalley & Retallick, 2012). At NC State University, students in a sophomore-level course, Introduction to Teaching Agriculture, have a required fieldwork component consisting of a minimum of 12 total hours of structured observations of agriculture teachers, microteaching activities, and reflections on the experience. In addition to completing observations, students must complete a field observation guide requiring detailed responses on the context of the school, planning and instruction, assessment, classroom routines and procedures, classroom management, FFA, and SAE. Students are also expected to teach a 30-minute lesson with an accompanying assessment allowing them to analyze student performance and reflect on strengths and challenges in their teaching.

Due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, schools across North Carolina are using a mix of delivery models, in-person, hybrid, and remote, throughout the fall semester. Additionally, several school systems expressed concern about hosting pre-service teachers due to capacity and social distancing requirements or privacy issues when delivering remote instruction. In response, the program faculty and graduate teaching assistants determined that there was a need to develop and offer an alternative field observation option that was fully remote.

### **How it Works**

First, the course instructor and graduate teaching assistants met to discuss how the different aspects of the field observation experience could be accomplished remotely. Similar to what had been used during in-person field observations, a guide was developed consisting of six activities to provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to observe and learn about current educational practices and reflect on how they might integrate similar practices in their future classroom.

Six videos were selected in ATLAS (Accomplished Teachers, Learning and Schools), a library resource of accomplished nationally board certified teachers. Research has reported that the use of videos for analysis has become a more common strategy in teacher preparation (Johnson & Cotterman, 2015; Santagata & Guarino, 2011) and provides students an opportunity to closely evaluate specific, critical practices (Santagata et al., 2007). Using these videos, students were asked to observe effective teaching characteristics and the integration of teaching methods and questioning strategies. For classroom management, students watched two YouTube videos specific to classroom procedures and management strategies and described how they were used by the teachers. During the summer agriculture teachers' conference, two North Carolina

agriculture teachers discussed integration of FFA and SAE in their agriculture programs. These videos were used to encourage students to think about their guiding principles as future FFA advisors and the implementation of SAE. Finally, students were asked to utilize social media outlets to create a list of five innovative teaching ideas that could be used in the classroom. Several social media links were provided for students, but they could also utilize links of their own choosing.

### **Results to Date**

The remote field observation experience was developed and implemented in Fall 2020. All 30 students in the course completed their remote field observations and the submitted assignments were well done, with a class average of a 96%. Comments provided on the course evaluations indicated students would have preferred to complete both the course and the field observation components in a face-to-face setting, but recognized the inability to do so as a result of the pandemic.

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

While the course instructor plans to return to a traditional approach consisting of observations completed in the schools, there still are opportunities for the use of the remote experiences. If students have extenuating circumstances such as lack of transportation or scheduling conflicts, they could be given the option of completing their field experience using the remote option. Additionally, remote activities can be used to supplement classroom observations and provide students with a few common experiences since there is considerable variation in what students observe across the different classrooms.

With the potential of continued use of the remote field observation guide, additional agricultural education specific videos and resources will be created and included. Also, an example of how to complete the section on innovative teaching ideas will be included as this seemed to generate questions from several students and required additional clarification.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Since the field observation guide had been developed and used in previous semesters, the primary time investment was selecting videos and modifying the observation prompts and activities. This work took approximately 10 hours. Also, several of the activities required students to access videos on ATLAS. NC State University has an institutional subscription, which has a varying level of cost based on size of the organization and length of the subscription. NC State University currently pays \$4990 for 300 subscriptions per year, so the instructor was able to request and receive individual accounts for all 30 students in the course.

### References

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