

Virtual Preservice Observations in the COVID-19 Era

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Need for Innovation

The current climate of COVID-19 regulations has greatly restricted our ability to provide preclinical observation experiences for school-based agricultural education (SBAE) preservice teachers. Smalley and Retallick (2012) highlight the importance and relevance of early field experiences in real classroom environments for preservice teachers. These vicarious and mastery experiences are invaluable in building teacher self-efficacy for preservice teachers (Bandura, 1997). However, frequently changing university and local school district COVID-19 protocols dictate the availability of SBAE classrooms as observation sites for preservice teachers.

Oklahoma State University (OSU) Professional Education Unit (PEU) mandates 60 hours of observation before preservice teachers are admitted as student teacher interns (OSU Professional Education Unit, 2020). Previously, these hours were met in part by a group field trip and multiple individual observations to SBAE programs. Preservice teachers visited local SBAE programs to tour facilities, observe classroom instruction, and participate in FFA advising and SAE supervision activities.

In the Fall of 2020, OSU agricultural education faculty were charged with providing safe opportunities to complete observation hours for current SBAE preservice teachers. With approval from the PEU, virtual observations were organized with the cooperation of Oklahoma SBAE teachers.

How it Works

Potential observation sites were chosen from the list of clinical internship cooperating centers, thus ensuring quality Oklahoma SBAE programs would be highlighted for preservice teachers. The cooperating centers were contacted to request a short video highlighting the instruction, FFA, and supervised agricultural experience (SAE) portions of their programs. Program facilities, curriculum, and community information were also included. The videos serve as a tour of facilities as the SBAE teacher narrates highlights of the program. SBAE teachers were asked to hide student faces to protect the privacy of minor students.

SBAE teachers were directed to a OneDrive folder to upload their videos once completed. This folder is also shared among the OSU agricultural education faculty and graduate students. Faculty then access the video(s) they wish to share with preservice teachers. Videos are used to highlight course topics and provide real-world examples.

The use of videos allow faculty to provide directed observation activities of quality SBAE teachers and programs. This can be done in a group or individual format. Reflection is more meaningful as all students have observed the same videos. Additionally, both in-person and distance learning students are able to complete the same observations. Video observations follow COVID-19 protocols while also providing an educational experience for SBAE preservice teachers.

Results to Date

To date, 26 videos have been shared with the OSU agricultural education department. These videos represent SBAE programs across the state. Videos range from five to ten minutes in length. SBAE teachers used a variety of video platforms to produce their product. Many employed their students to assist as videographers and editors or used this activity as an assignment for an agricultural communications class. SBAE teachers were able to use the video as a marketing tool for their program by posting to their social media accounts.

In the OSU agricultural education department, videos are currently being used as preclinical observation opportunities. The videos replaced a field trip activity traditionally completed in a laboratory and clinical experience class for SBAE preservice teachers. Agricultural education faculty report multiple integrations of the videos in their courses. The videos provide a concrete example of course topics being employed by current SBAE teachers.

Preservice SBAE teachers are able to use these videos to partially complete their observation requirements. The 2021 and 2022 cohorts of student teacher interns are able to meet PEU requirements without risk of COVID-19 exposure. The videos have been mutually beneficial to SBAE teachers, teacher educators, and preservice teachers.

Future Plans

The videos will continue to be used in the agricultural education department at OSU. Additionally, videos will be made available to preservice teachers to assist with placement in student teaching centers. OSU agricultural education policy dictates student teachers be placed at least 50 miles from their home school district (OSU Agricultural Education, 2020). Preservice teacher input is carefully considered when placing student teachers. These videos will allow preservice teachers to be more aware of opportunities within each SBAE program to more accurately report their top preferences to university supervisors. As the list of cooperating teachers expand, more videos will be requested from selected SBAE teachers. Videos will continue to be used for both preservice teacher education and student teacher placement when COVID-19 safety protocols are lifted.

Resources Needed

This innovative idea can be implemented with no additional funding. SBAE teacher cooperation is the most crucial component. To encourage current SBAE teachers to participate, teacher educators should highlight the benefit of the learning activity to their students and the marketing tool for the program.

Videos can be hosted and shared through multiple platforms. We used Microsoft OneDrive, but Google Drive and YouTube would work as well. A strong internet connection is needed to upload and view the videos. Time limits will help direct SBAE teachers to produce manageably sized files. The outcomes of the videos greatly outweigh the inputs required.

References

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