

**Exploring and Reflecting with an Agricultural Education Teaching Cohort: Understanding
how Pre-service Teachers Establish and Maintain Classroom Norms**

Natalie Vaz
Oregon State University
108 Strand Hall
Corvallis, OR 97331
541-737-2661
natalie.vaz@oregonstate.edu

Josh Stewart
Oregon State University
130A Strand Hall
Corvallis, OR 97331
541-737-2661
josh.stewart@oregonstate.edu

Exploring and Reflecting with an Agricultural Education Teaching Cohort: Understanding how Pre-service Teachers Establish and Maintain Classroom Norms

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

A significant component of any traditional teacher preparation program is the student teaching internship, where teacher candidates are given the opportunity to apply lessons learned through coursework (e.g., skills, theories, strategies) to practical experiences in the classroom (Barry et al., 2021). Of the many valuable tools learned through a teacher preparation program, the candidate's ability to establish and maintain classroom norms remains one of the most important and practical. "The foundation of the learning community includes the agreements, policies, procedures and rules by which everyone is willing to live." (DePorter et al., 1999, p. 54). Classroom norms help establish structure and expectations (DePorter et al., 1999), although students and teachers will all bring their own beliefs, prior knowledge, and attitudes to the classroom that will affect how classroom norms are established (Ambrose et al., 2010). Together, the students and teachers will influence one another's perspectives on norms and, as a result, negotiate norms and their meanings (Yackel & Cobb, 1996).

This exploratory study was grounded in Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory, specifically focused on the reflective observation component of the model. Within Kolb's (2015) model, "reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn" (p. 51). Zeichner and Liston (1987) acknowledged the fact that what teachers reflect on and to what degree they inquire is of critical importance. According to Stoughton (2007), "It is crucial to continue to provide spaces where future teachers can do the important work of examining what is, what can be, and the implications of their choices for themselves as teachers, for the children they teach..." (p. 1036-1037). Schön (1983) described reflection-on-action as retrospectively looking back on an experience. We sought to utilize reflection-on-action through questioning to help teacher candidates consider how they established and maintained classroom norms during student teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how the candidates of the Agricultural Education teaching cohort at Oregon State University establish and maintain classroom norms during their student teaching internship. This study aligns with the National Research Agenda Priority Area 5, Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs (Roberts et al., 2016).

Methodology

We utilized a case study approach in order to explore the phenomenon in question. According to Yin (2009), "...the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events..." (p. 4). Participants included 3 teacher candidates who were student teaching during the 2021-2022 academic year. Data were collected through teacher candidate observations, follow-up interviews, and researcher field notes, for triangulation purposes (Yin, 2009). All teaching observations were audio-recorded, and researcher memos were generated through each step of data collection and analysis. Analyzing and coding field notes and memos from the observations fostered the generation of initial themes related to

classroom norms the participants had (or had not) established. The reflective nature of the interviews allowed a deeper understanding about participants' beliefs and understanding about classroom norms, how they are established, and strategies for maintaining norms, which provided converging evidence to support the findings (Yin, 2009).

Findings

Five themes were identified: *1) use of classroom contracts*, *(2) redirection of classroom norms*, *(3) growth/future aspirations*, *(4) support*, and *(5) motivation*. The use of *classroom contracts* supported how the candidates established their classroom culture, which included classroom norms that students and teachers agreed upon, respected, and followed. One candidate said, "Classroom contracts serve as the foundation of our classroom culture and atmosphere. If you don't have those contracts, then students don't really know what is expected of them." One interesting finding noted from the observations, was the lack of awareness candidates had when it came to their *redirection of classroom norms*. Candidates shared through the interview process that they felt confident in the area of classroom management and that students understood the expectations of their classroom contract. However, it was evident instead that candidates spent an ample amount of time redirecting their norms throughout their lesson. Candidates reflected on their *growth* throughout their field experiences and how they learned that classroom norms should have a stronger presence from the very beginning of the experience. Looking forward, candidates expressed *future aspirations* that include a different approach on how to establish their classroom norms as well as how to implement follow-through with their students in reflection, candidates shared they would appreciate more *support* from mentors (i.e., cooperating teachers and university supervisors) in equipping them with the right tools on how to implement classroom norms. One candidate shared, "I struggle with classroom norms, and I wish that I would have had more help with establishing them from the beginning, before I started student teaching." Finally, as candidates reached the end of their field experiences, they found a sense of *motivation through* lived personal experiences, and previous mentors and teachers. They expressed being motivated to become experts in establishing and maintaining classroom norms.

Conclusions/ Recommendations/ Implications

Through reflection-on-action, we can begin to understand how teacher candidates in an agricultural education teacher preparation program establish and maintain classroom norms during their student teaching experiences. There is an evident connection between the candidates and their mentors, indicating the candidates rely on these individuals for support and guidance. We can also conclude through this research that candidates were comfortable in creating norms of their own, through the use of a classroom contract. Interestingly, candidates spent a lot of time during their lessons redirecting classroom norms, which may be due to their lack of skills, tools, or strategies they requested from their mentors.

The results of this study support the need for a self-assessment of agriculture teacher education programs to identify methods and strategies effective in facilitating curriculum development that helps support candidates in their overall classroom management efficiency, as well as assessment tools and strategies, including observation and reflection protocols. The reflective nature of this case study was helpful in the assessment of our teacher education program, highlighting one area of need for future emphasis.

References

- Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., Lovett, M. C., DiPietro, M., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works*. Jossey-Bass.
- Barry, D. M., Diaz, J. M., Ferand, N. K., Myers, B. E., & Wysocki, A. F. (2021). Improving the student teaching experience: A Delphi study of cooperating teacher needs. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 62(4), 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2021.4037>
- DePorter, B., Reardon, M., & Singer-Nourie, S. (1999). *Quantum teaching*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
- Roberts, T. G., Harder, A., Brashears, M. T. (Eds.) (2016). *American Association for Agricultural Education national research agenda: 2016-2020*. Gainesville, FL: Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think*. Basic Book, Inc.
- Stoughton, E. H. (2007). "How will I get them to behave?": Pre service teachers reflect on classroom management. *Teaching and teacher Education*, 23(7), 1024-1037.
- Yackel, E., & Cobb, P. (1996). Sociomathematical norms, argumentation, and autonomy in Mathematics. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 27(4), 458-477. <https://doi.org/10.5951/jresmetheduc.27.4.0458>
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Zeichner, K. M., & Liston, D. P. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j18v7162275t1w3w>