

**Using Mock Interviews with School Administrators to Prepare Pre-service Teachers
to Successfully Navigate the Teaching Position Interview Process**

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Introduction

The teacher selection process is complicated and often has numerous steps. One of the most common and important steps in selecting a teacher for a vacancy is interviewing with building-level personnel, such as school administrators (Strong & Hindman, 2006). The interview process itself can be quite rigorous and comes with its own set of advantages, such as an in-depth examination of a prospective candidate, as well as disadvantages, such as subjectivity to interviewer bias. Ideally, interviewers seek to hire high-quality, effective teachers who can adequately serve their students, their schools, and their community at-large. However, when considering newly-certified teachers for positions in comparison to experienced teachers, interviewers may sometimes encounter challenges when asking questions, such as those related to experiences with classroom management and successful student motivation techniques (Strong & Hindman, 2006). Likewise, newly-certified teachers may encounter unexpected challenges in the teaching position interview process if they are not adequately prepared (Talbert et al., 2022).

Talbert et al. (2022) provided several recommendations for newly-licensed teachers when preparing to interview for a teaching position, including: (1) preparing an organized, quality application materials packet, (2) dressing professionally for the interview, and (3) engaging in mock interviews to both help overcome potentially bad habits and to anticipate possible interview questions. Considering the preceding literature, perhaps engaging pre-service teachers in mock interviews with current school administrators would be valuable for helping them prepare to navigate their first teaching position search.

How it Works

During the Fall 2022 semester, the lead author of this abstract taught 13 pre-service teachers in a senior-level instructional methods course. Within this course, he developed and implemented an activity that focused on preparing his pre-service teachers to interview for actual teaching positions during the Spring 2023 semester and beyond. To initiate the process, the lead author collaborated with another agricultural teacher educator at his university to identify prospective school administrators who would be willing to work with his pre-service teachers. He originally sought current administrators who were previously school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers. However, he found the pool of administrators with such experience who were simultaneously located within reasonable driving distance from the university was rather limited. Instead, he reached out to school administrators who have strong ties to the SBAE programs at their schools and who likewise openly value the programs. Two administrators from two different high schools approximately two hours away agreed to travel to the university and conduct the mock interviews.

The lead author scheduled the mock interviews to take place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M. on Thursday, November 10, 2022. On Tuesday, November 8, 2022, the lead author led an in-class discussion about the teaching position interview process and posed several example interview questions to the pre-service teachers to stimulate their thinking about the

topic. He further instructed the pre-service teachers to be prepared to ask their own questions, to dress professionally for the interview, and to bring an updated copy of their resumé with them.

The school administrators arrived at the university shortly before 10:00 A.M. on November 10th. Prior to their arrival, the lead author staged two interview areas for each one. These interview areas were placed in separate rooms and consisted of a collapsible metal classroom table and two office chairs. After the school administrators and the pre-service teachers arrived in the classroom, they introduced themselves in a large group setting. The lead author then assigned seven pre-service teachers to one school administrator and six to the other. To make the best use of the available timeframe, the lead author asked both school administrators to restrict each one-on-one interview to a maximum length of 15 minutes. The school administrators then called each pre-service teacher in for their mock interview. After the 13 mock interviews concluded, the school administrators debriefed all the pre-service teachers as a group and shared their advice regarding further interview preparation strategies. The lead author requested that the pre-service teachers ask any questions they had. He then dismissed the pre-service teachers and took the school administrators to lunch as a token of appreciation for their assistance with the mock interviews.

Implications

The school administrators privately expressed to the lead author that they were impressed with the quality and preparation exhibited by all the pre-service teachers they interviewed. They were also appreciative of the opportunity to be part of the mock interview activity and desired to do so again during the 2023-2024 academic year. All 13 pre-service teachers indicated to the lead author that they believed this activity was helpful to them. Regarding the eight pre-service teachers who completed their student teaching experience during the Spring 2023 semester, four of them had been offered teaching positions prior to graduation. Anecdotally, all eight pre-service teachers reported that the mock interview activity had aided them in the teaching position search. However, they did advise him to consider selecting school administrators with more direct knowledge about, and experience with, SBAE in future activity iterations.

Future Plans and Advice to Others

The lead author plans to continue conducting this activity for the foreseeable future. He will use the feedback that he received to amend future iterations of the mock interview activity. If they are not already doing so, the lead author recommends that other agricultural teacher educators consider implementing similar activities with their own pre-service teachers to better-prepare them for the teaching position interview process.

Costs

The lead author spent approximately \$60.00 to purchase lunch for the two school administrators. While he was unable to do so for this iteration of the activity, the lead author plans to offer mileage reimbursement to school administrators who participate in the future. The school administrators used approximately six hours of their time to participate in this activity. The lead author used roughly four hours of his time to plan and implement this activity.

References

Strong, J. H., & Hindman, J. L. (2006). *The teacher quality index: A protocol for teacher selection*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Talbert, B. A., Croom, B., LaRose, S. E., Vaughn, R., & Lee, J. S. (2022). *Foundations of agricultural education* (4th ed.). Purdue University Press.