

**Leading With Positive Emotions: Examining SBAE University Supervisors' Feedback  
Through a Positive Psychology Framework**

Kirby Schmidt  
POWDR Corp.,  
kschmidt@powdr.com

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

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

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### **Introduction**

In teacher education, the university supervisor's role is to "promote teacher growth which leads to improvement in teaching performance and increasing student learning" (Nolan & Hoover, 2004, p.26). Research has identified one facet of supervision that is influential: the feedback process (Sikula 1996). The feedback process commonly occurs during a post-observation conference, and involves moments for reflection, elaboration, connections and creating plans for action (Palmeri & Peter, 2019), but continuing research raises questions about *how* this process works (Sikula, 1996) and *if* the supervisors' practices work (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Despite being highly valued, university supervisors in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) have received limited attention (Fritz & Miller, 2003). SBAE university supervisors have been urged to examine their practices and expected to create positive field experiences for teacher candidates (Fritz & Miller, 2003; Rubenstein & Thoron, 2013). Yet, SBAE literature sparingly associates the feedback process common to supervision with positive language and instead suggests more emphasis on critique and evaluation (Paulsen et al., 2016; Shoulders et al., 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to consider dimensions of positivity while exploring the experiences of university supervisors and their feedback processes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Feedback processes should occur as conversations that affirm strengths (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007), and push the teacher candidate to self-identify improvement in their instructional practices (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), which will ultimately self-direct their own growth (Wade et al., 2015). The emergent field of positive psychology is one theoretical framework to re-imagine how we situate the future of research on feedback processes. Positive psychology focuses on the study of positive experiences, environments, and qualities which contribute to a higher quality of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the context of feedback processes, Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden & Build Theory yields potential for inquiry. The Broaden and Build Theory emphasizes the importance of positive emotions to an individual's ability to see possibilities and broaden their horizons (Fredrickson, 2001). The additive process of positive emotions and experiences encourages action, problem-solving, and long-term flourishing for the recipient; and the presence of positive emotions are catalytic to both the immediate and long-term expansion of thinking and problem solving amid challenging situations (Fredrickson, 2001).

### **Methodology**

Inquiry was conducted through hermeneutic phenomenology, where the researcher strives to describe and study lived experiences (Laverty, 2003), and work towards interpreting the essence of these experiences (van Manen, 1990). Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify the participants (Groenewald, 2004). The criterion for SBAE university supervisors to be included in this study were: (1) currently employed in a university teacher education position which includes field experience supervision of teacher candidates, (2) have past supervisory experiences, and (3) are willing to talk about their unique experiences (Laverty, 2003). Six participants from across the U.S. took part in the study. Lived experiences (data) of university supervisors were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and ongoing conversation

and relationship building (van Manen, 1990). Three distinct interviews with each participant were used to discuss past experiences with the phenomenon, detail present experiences, and reflect about the essence of the phenomenon. Additionally, observations of post-observation conferences were recorded, included with the aggregate data corpus (Frechette et al., 2020), and used to facilitate discussions with participants about the conferences. All data, including reflexive memos, were coded for theme development with the back-and-forth process of hermeneutics (Frechette et al., 2020), using the theoretical framework as an analytical tool.

### **Findings**

One overarching theme related to positive emotions was interpreted: Leading with Positive Emotions. Positive emotions informed how these supervisors interacted with their teacher candidates. The positive emotions conveyed and cultivated by supervisors were catalysts for a productive feedback process. The positive emotions most prevalent and influential on their supervisory practices included: gratitude, joy, interest, pride, amusement, and hope. These supervisors' individual actions, as well as their shared experiences related to positive emotions, pointed towards broadened thinking, and a buildup of positive experiences for their teacher candidates to carry forward in their field experiences and hopefully, throughout their careers.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study provides insightful possibilities for our teacher education programs to reflect on their existing practices, and how they prepare supervisors to engage with teacher candidates. Similar to Rubenstein & Thoron (2013), these supervisors wanted to empower teacher candidates to reflect, evaluate, and take ownership of their own practices. When doing so, the supervisors hoped to promote a higher degree of self-efficacy in teacher candidates, fueled by positive emotions. These supervisors believed in a feedback process marked by reflective practice, positivity, and continuous improvement, where the teacher candidate is the primary agent for identifying and taking action. Their collective beliefs and behaviors reflected a more unstructured approach to supervision, which supports evidence these supervisors wanted their teacher candidates to self-direct the feedback process (Stephens & Waters, 2009), which contrasts the structured outcomes observed by both Fritz & Miller (2003), and Rubenstein & Thoron (2013). Additionally, many of these supervisors set up their teacher candidates for immediate success and broadened thinking by integrating past coursework related to effective teaching as the foundation of their conversation. Furthermore, positive emotions interwoven in the feedback process help build teacher candidate's self-efficacy (Wolf et al., 2010).

Unique to this study, supervisors recorded and reflected on their own practices of supervision in terms of their own improvement and gathering of evidence of their own effectiveness. These supervisors all noticed areas for their own improvement after watching their own practices of supervision. Are other university supervisors, cooperating teachers, or administrators, engaged in reflection and analysis of their own practice for continuous development like they expect from their teacher candidates? We have evidence of the Broaden and Build Theory occurring within the experiences of these supervisors, particularly the desire for a positive mindset (Rubenstein & Thoron, 2013), the perception of how this can undo tension (Palmeri & Peter, 2019), and lead to teacher candidate reflection (Fritz & Miller, 2003). We recommend further research investigating other populations in agricultural education, exploring graduate programs that prepare teacher educators, and the development of communities of practice for teacher educators to further explore feedback processes with teacher candidates.

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