

Using Simulated Activities in Teacher Preparation Programs

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Introduction/Need for Idea

Due to the amount of material taught in agricultural education teacher preparation programs, there is a need to keep the students engaged, to be challenged, and gain the most knowledge from the courses. Simulated activities, such as assisting local and national agricultural education program events help the students to better understand the material being presented, the model of school-based agriculture education, and gain hands-on experience. “Simulation training could reinforce common practice and could solve their lack of precision and strengthen their confidence in teaching without the risk of harming real pupils” (Samuelsson et al., 2022). These methods allow students to see and understand daily activities that they might have to complete when they get into the classroom.

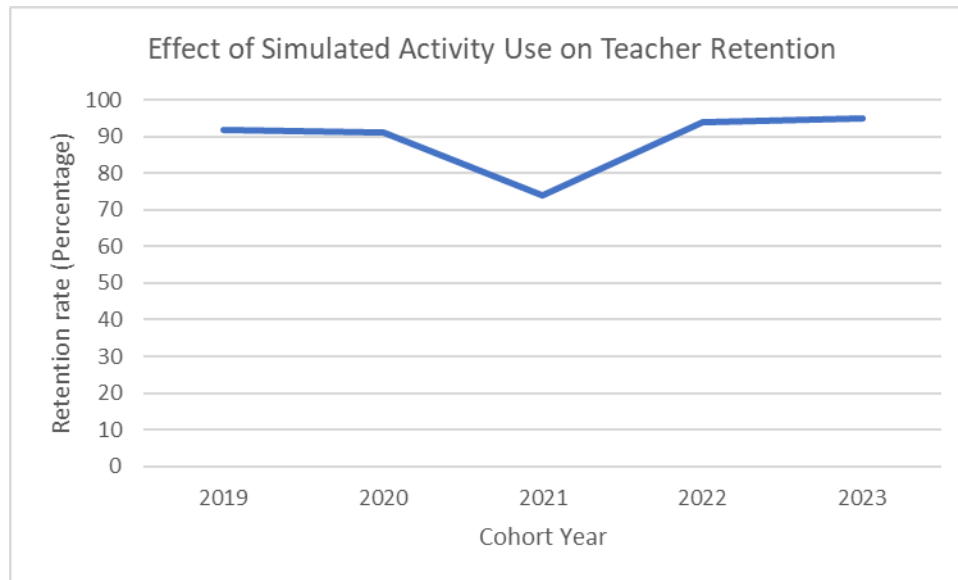
Methodology

In two of the senior cohort classes, Agriculture Practicum and Early Clinical Experience in Ag Education, students follow a model where they receive experience from going into classrooms, team-teaching, completing 10 “pick 10” events outside of class time, and facilitating events for current middle and high school level agriculture students. “Most agriculture teachers have a college degree in agricultural teacher education plus additional formal and informal education.” (Talbert, 2022). Following the simulations that the students complete, they must reflect on what they have learned, along with ways to use the knowledge they have gained from the simulation in their future classroom. These experiences were developed based on the working knowledge professors received through their school-based agricultural teaching experience, cooperating teacher feedback, and advisory committee recommendations. Students completed the following activities the semester before student teaching:

Event:	Participation/Reflection:
Coordinated and conducted Sunbelt Ag Expo Youth Challenge for 800+ students.	Students in the program curated, proctored, and graded an exam for middle through high school students to complete. They then had to reflect on what role they took in the development of the event and how it would help them in their future career.
Received performance evaluations based on the state Ag Education Program of Work and a mock interview.	Cohort members were required to become familiar with the state Program of Work for Agricultural Education to complete a notebook, mock interview, and program review. This allows the students to become more knowledgeable of what is required of them when entering the profession.
Multiple visits to local and statewide ag program facilities	Students were able to travel to ag programs in local counties and across the state. These visits were facilitated by leading agriculture teachers from the programs. This allowed students to experience what ag education program labs may be offered in future positions.
Facilitate state FFA events such as CDE’s, region rallies, and livestock shows.	Senior Agriculture Education majors attended state FFA sanctioned events and assisted with judging, scoring, monitoring holding rooms, and directing students. By partaking, they will be better able to prepare their future students for competitions.

Results to Date/Implications

This simulated teaching style has proven to be effective as the graduating students are more prepared as first-year teachers for how to handle the different varieties and levels of tasks that they will be facing during their time in and out of the classroom than those of programs with little or no simulated teaching style. Data was collected from the previous five cohorts as to how many of those graduates are still in the field of education, whether that is through the traditional classroom or extension services. Graph 1 shows those results. “Research documents a positive connection between teachers’ subject matter knowledge and their performance in the classroom, it has been established that teachers with advanced preparation (in addition to typical coursework and fieldwork experiences) in teaching methods and strategies have a greater chance of successful longevity in the classroom” (Landon-Hays et al., 2020).



Graph 1

Future Plans

After reviewing the methods of using simulated activities within the teacher preparation program, the professors have decided to continue using the simulated model. It has proven to be beneficial for the students coming through the program. To keep getting the most out of the simulations in the courses, the professors plan to gain further feedback by surveying all agricultural education graduates, cooperating teachers, and the advisory committee to ensure that the model is preparing the students for both student teaching and the workforce. This survey will include questions about how prepared they felt about various program components such as classroom management, using the three-ring model, and other aspects of the daily ag teacher life, then be used to make changes to content and delivery methods.

Costs/Resources Needed

For the simulated teaching process to work in a pre-service teacher program, there must be professors who have experience in the field, who are inclined to provide the students with outside experiences and advice. Cooperation from school-based agricultural educators and their local school systems, as well as regional and state agricultural education staff and other stakeholders, is vital. Support from college administration is critical and must be encouraging to the professors, the students, and of the courses. Financially, there are travel expenses required to make the simulated activities possible. Each fall semester, the department spends about \$450 on fuel costs and any other miscellaneous expenses like meals.

References

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- Talbert, B. A. (2022). *Foundations of Agricultural Education*. Purdue University Press.