

Tracking Success: Leveraging AET for Preservice Teachers' Early Field Experiences

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Introduction

Early field experiences (EFEs) are designed to provide preservice teachers with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the teaching process while also helping to decrease stress and anxiety before entering the teaching profession (Scherer, 1997). Guyton and Byrd (2000) reported an EFE may include several school-related experiences that take place before student teaching. A well-developed EFE will provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to experience the many roles required of an in-service teacher (Best, 2025; Carter & Anders, 1996). Smalley and Retallick (2012) emphasized, at a minimum, EFE should offer a clear purpose and include activities that can be replicated to prepare pre-service teachers for their future careers effectively.

In 2007, the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET) was developed to provide in-service teachers with the ability to track student's Supervised Agricultural Experiences with a digital alternative (AET, 2025). According to Price et al., (2020) the world has become increasingly digital, thus, the movement to the AET system has gained popularity since its introduction. Despite the widespread adoption of AET as the official record-keeping system in many states, numerous educators' express frustration with using AET in their programs and classrooms (Ferand et al., 2020; Price et al., 2023; Sorensen et al., 2014; Toombs et al., 2022).

Despite the frustration expressed by educators', the reality is over 78% of School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) programs use the AET system (Hanagriff, 2023). Nevertheless, Sorenson et al. (2014) found both early-career (those with six or fewer years of teaching experience) and experienced (those with six or more years of teaching experience) teachers identified AET as one of the highest in-service needs. In addition, Toombs et al. (2022) reported preservice teachers have low self-confidence in managing financial data within student record books, highlighting the need for future research in these areas.

How it works

Oklahoma State University has implemented a structured system to enhance preservice teachers early field experiences through the AET record-keeping system. This initiative requires two distinct methods for tracking and maintaining early field experiences. Initial teacher certification requires preservice teachers to complete 60 hours of classroom observation. Additionally, faculty work to provide real-world contextual experiences both inside and outside the classroom. To capture these experiences, preservice teachers are provided two separate AET accounts. The first account is used for logging skills, describing activities, and uploading photos related to early field experiences as part of their coursework in the Advising Student Organizations and Supervising Experiential Learning course. This account allows students to document their progress and reflect on their learning.

Pre-service teachers utilize the AG Teacher Tracker to monitor their teacher observations and other field experiences necessary for fulfilling the 60-hour requirement for their Oklahoma teaching license. This system offers a distinct login, allowing students to experience the AET system from the perspective of an in-service teacher. In addition to reflecting on teaching observations, preservice teachers complete proficiency award applications based on contextualized lab experiences offered through coursework.

This dual-account approach provides preservice teachers with the opportunity to engage with the AET system from two distinct perspectives. First, as students logging weekly activities, and second, as teachers tracking professional growth and development. This experience is designed to enhance organizational skills, accountability, and practical understanding of the teaching profession. The implementation of this approach to AET and EFEs can be beneficial in today's dynamic and fast-paced educational environment, providing preservice teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary to succeed in their future careers.

Results

Generally, students expressed a need for more training in the AET system for both educational and teacher-tracking tasks. They recognized that proficiency in using the AET system is crucial for their students' success and future agricultural education opportunities. Students indicated they had a better understanding of "how to use AET as a tool for both students and teachers" and stated, "I am much more comfortable with teaching my students about SAE's now that I know how to navigate the AET system."

Future Plans

Future plans for this instructional skill involve having future cohorts of pre-service teachers use AET to track and manage their early field experiences. This initiative aims to familiarize students with the AET system, focusing on its application for SBEA teachers rather than solely from a student perspective.

The ability to use and teach this technology will be crucial for their students' success in daily learning goals and participation in local, district, state, and national FFA events. This approach ensures that pre-service teachers feel confident and capable of helping their students navigate the AET system, thereby enhancing their educational opportunities and achievements.

Costs

The cost and resources needed for this initiative are minimal. Access to AET is free for teacher preparation programs. The time investment from professors and graduate students is estimated to be four to five hours per week during the course duration. This cost-effective approach enables most educational institutions to adopt the program easily.

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