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Early field experiences in agricultural teacher education

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Early field experiences in agricultural teacher education

by

Michael Steven Retallick

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Agricultural Education

Program of Study Committee:
Greg Miller, Major Professor
W. Wade Miller
B. Lynn Jones
Larry Ebbers
Patricia Carlson

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2005

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CHAPTER I: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) describes early field experience as the range of school experiences, which occur prior to student teaching for those students in preservice teacher education (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). In this chapter, the background and setting for this study will be established. A statement of the problem will be provided as well as the objectives of the study. Finally, the organization of this dissertation will be described.

Background and Setting

Educational reform during the past decade has been a driving force behind changes in teacher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). These reform efforts have been categorized into four broad areas: 1) standards, assessment, and accountability; 2) school finance reforms; 3) teacher training and school resources; and 4) school choice options. One aspect of the teacher training reform has centered on early field experience (EFE) as a component of teacher education programs.

The reform efforts have influenced both accrediting organizations and professional organizations to develop standards that specifically refer to and affect early field experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed such a standard for the teacher education profession (NCATE, 2002). In agricultural education, the American Association of Agricultural Educators (2001) has addressed early field experience as part of their National Standards for Teacher Education in Agriculture.

The reform efforts along with the enhancement of standards have caused individual teacher education programs to make changes. Connors and Mundt (2001) learned that over
half of preservice teacher education programs in agricultural education had either just made changes or were planning program structure changes at the time of their study.

To date, little is known about early field experience in agricultural education. A review of 562 articles in the *Journal of Agricultural Education* published between 1989 and 2003 revealed that only three articles provided any information on early field experience in agricultural teacher education programs. As a result, the extent to which early field experience has been developed and used in preservice agricultural teacher education is not known.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the use and acceptance of early field experience, Kelleher, Collins and Williams (1995) suggest that “there is little substantive evidence regarding either the exact nature or resulting outcomes of such programs” (p. 38). The agricultural education profession faces a similar problem. Standards have been developed to include EFE as a means of improving teacher education; however, these standards do not outline the specific requirements that should be completed through EFE (Connors & Mundt, 2001). Furthermore, Connors and Mundt admit that the standards have been developed as a guide, but do not provide technical information about what students should be required to complete as part of EFE. In short, little research has been conducted in agricultural education to determine how EFE is used in the preparation of future agricultural educators.

Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the nature of early field experience in agricultural teacher education programs nationally. The study will focus on three research objectives.
1. Describe the nature of early field experiences in agricultural teacher education nationally.

2. Describe the implementation of early field experiences within the context of agricultural teacher education.

3. Synthesize the literature related to the structure and content of early field experiences.

Significance of the Study

The results of the overall study will begin to address the problem suggested by Kelleher, Collins, and Williams (1995). The agricultural teacher education profession will have a better understanding of the nature of early field experiences in agricultural education. A better understanding of the nature of EFE will benefit future development, reorganization and evaluation of early field experiences. In short, this study is a means of developing a better understanding of, and perhaps improving, one aspect of preservice teacher preparation in agricultural education.

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is a general introduction to the dissertation. Chapter two is an extensive literature review of early field experiences in teacher education. Chapter three is a research article that describes the results of a descriptive census study on early field experiences in agricultural teacher education. The fourth chapter is a research article using content analysis that presents data describing the means by which early field experiences in agricultural teacher education are offered. Chapter five is a theoretical article that offers a model focusing on the content and structure of EFE. In chapter six, general conclusions of the dissertation are presented.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Early field experience (EFE) is a primary and integral component of teacher education. In Chapter II, a theoretical framework for EFE will be established. The purpose of EFE will be identified. EFE’s role within teacher education and issues with EFE will be reviewed. A discussion of accreditation and standards as they relate to early field experience is provided. Finally, the available research related to EFE in agricultural education will be examined.

Theoretical Framework for Early Field Experience

McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) has suggested that the teacher education profession does not have a well conceived theoretical base for EFE. However, the American Association of Agricultural Educators (2001) declared experiential learning as the basis for EFE in agricultural teacher education. Therefore, the works of John Dewey (1938, 1916) and others (Kolb, 1984; Knowles & Cole, 1994, 1996) in experiential learning provided the theoretical foundation for this study.

Dewey (1938) believed there is an organic connection between education and personal experience. He also theorized that the educational impact of any experience is dependent on the quality of the experience, and its ability to influence later experiences. Dewey promoted what he called the principle of continuity of experience. Dewey defined continuity of experience as a means by which “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35).
Kolb (1984) drew primarily on the works of Dewey (1938; 1916), Lewin (1948) (who stressed the importance of people being active in learning), and Jean Piaget (1995) (who described intelligence as the result of the interaction of the person and the environment). Kolb (1984) argued that people do learn from experience, and that experience-based education has become widely accepted as a method of instruction in higher education. According to him, experience offered “the foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process that is soundly based in intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology” (pp. 3-4).

Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a “means for examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work, and personal development” (p. 4). He suggested that knowledge is created as a result of one’s experiences and the transformation of those experiences. Kolb’s model suggested that experiential learning occurs in a four-stage cycle using four adaptive learning modes – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The grasping of experience occurs through the apprehension of the concrete experience and the comprehension of the abstract conceptualization. The transformation occurs through the intention of the reflective observation and through the extension of the active experimentation.

Knowles & Cole (1994, 1996) have written extensively about field experiences in education and value the learning potential of preservice field experiences. These authors have built upon the experiential learning philosophies of Dewey and Kolb and have applied it to field experiences in teacher education. They viewed teacher education as a “lifelong process of continuing growth with preservice programs, including field experiences,
providing the contexts for the formal beginnings of career long development” (Knowles & Cole, 1996, p. 650).

Knowles & Cole (1994) proposed a cyclical yet spiral framework for experiential learning, which would include preservice field experiences (Figure 1). The foundation for learning in the model is experience with individual learning enrichment occurring throughout the experiential learning process. The authors believed this process occurs in four stages in a circular, upward spiraling motion as students develop, grow and move on to new experiences. The first stage is the personal experience and practice. The second stage is information (internal and external) gathering and documentation. Reflection, analysis and development of personal theories are the third stage. The final stage is the movement of the student toward informed action.

![Figure 1. Knowles and Cole’s (1994) experiential learning cycle/spiral](image)

Purpose of Early Field Experience

Early field experience (EFE) is one of the first formal experiences in a real classroom for students enrolled in preservice teacher education programs. EFE is “an integral program component for initial and advanced” teacher preparation (NCATE, 2002, p. 27). EFE allows preservice teachers to immerse themselves into a classroom setting for the first time.

According to NCATE (2002), the purpose of EFE is to apply knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a variety of settings appropriate to the content and level of the student’s program through a variety of early and ongoing school-based opportunities. These could include observing, assisting, tutoring, instructing, and conducting applied research. Kelleher, Collins and Williams (1995) identified three purposes for early field experience: career exploration, melding theory and practice, and developing teaching skills.

EFE provides students the opportunity to start thinking like teachers as well as experiencing the role of a teacher early in their academic career (NCATE, 2002). Staffo, Baird, Clavelli, and Green (2002) and Pierce (1996) suggested that EFE provides a context from which students can relate theoretical and foundational coursework. EFE also allows preservice teachers the opportunity to begin to choose appropriate teaching strategies as well as understanding students’ social and cognitive backgrounds (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Pierce (1996) suggested that EFE provides students authentic learning, which should take place both early and regularly throughout preservice training.

McIntyre (1983) mentioned six benefits of early field experience to prospective teachers and teacher education programs. First, EFE allows students to learn early if they enjoy working with children and still want to teach. Second, EFE allows teacher education programs to determine the student’s potential as a teacher. Third, EFE enables students to
practice teaching skills prior to student teaching. Fourth, early field experience provides students the opportunity to develop a base of perceptions related to classroom life. Fifth, these experiences provide additional opportunities for universities and public schools to improve communication. Finally, early field experiences help to accelerate passage through the stages from student to teacher.

Role of EFE within Teacher Education

Early field experiences are the foundation, as well as the formal starting point, for preservice teacher education and the establishment of teachers as lifelong learners. Carter and Anders (1996) emphasized that teacher education programs should center on the teacher’s ability to inquire and think critically about teaching as a profession as well as their work in the classroom using personal knowledge and knowledge derived from research. However, becoming reflective is a developmental process where teacher educators bear the responsibility of guiding the preservice teachers through the development stages and through the critical thinking process (Moberly et al., 2002).

EFE provides the context for the formal beginnings of career-long development (Knowles & Cole, 1996). EFE serves as the introduction to such skill development and lifelong learning processes, which puts the preservice teacher on the path to continual lifelong learning. The result of this initial development is a student teacher who is more prepared for their clinical experiences, beginning teachers who are prepared to address induction issues, and professional teachers who are critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and managers of their own learning and professional development.

Knowles and Cole (1994, 1996) proposed an inquiry-based framework for field experiences. Such a framework enables preservice teachers to begin to take charge of their
educational experience through systematic reflection and analysis. The framework could provide further benefit by incorporating the suggestions of McIntyre et al. (1996). They suggested that programs provide an opportunity for students to not only personally practice reflectivity, but also observe experienced teachers practice reflection in their own classrooms.

Methods to stimulate internal reflection on one’s teaching are just as important as the methods to develop reflective skills focusing on the students in the classroom (Adler, 1993). A journal or log of one’s experiences and thoughts can facilitate teacher inquiry. As part of critical inquiry, such journaling should include exploring assumptions, questioning one’s beliefs and expectations, considering alternative explanations and actions, as well as noting confusing or perplexing events and ideas.

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future called for standards with a “strong emphasis on reflection and inquiry as a means to continually evaluate and improve teaching” (p. 77). Accrediting agencies and professional associations responded by re-evaluating their standards. NCATE updated their standards and TEAC was being developed as an alternative to NCATE accreditation. The accrediting agencies provided broad-based guidance through their standards. Professional organizations like AAAE provided more specific structure. AAAE standards expanded on the NCATE standards providing more detail on how to apply NCATE’s standards to agricultural teacher education. AAAE (2001) standards suggested that reflection and journaling be included in a structured EFE program. Reflection could occur through written and oral communication using portfolios, journals, and self-assessment of microteachings (AAAE, 2001). Although they have varying degrees of effectiveness, McIntyre et al. (1996) and Cruickshank (1985)
suggested the use of microteaching, video technology, and case studies as part of students’ field experiences as well.

Researchers (Guyton & Byrd, 2000; Knowles & Cole, 1996; McIntyre et. al., 1996; Moore, 2003) cautioned against focusing the entire early field experience on procedural activities. However, it seems appropriate to require students to conduct some procedural activities like collecting materials (i.e. syllabi, worksheets, handbooks, etc.) and conducting interviews insofar that those activities are not the primary or sole activities of the experience. Doing so would defeat the ultimate purpose of early field experience.

In addition to developing teaching skills and transitioning toward lifelong learning, EFE must also provide an opportunity for students to develop an understanding of the complexities of teaching. Carter and Anders (1996) identified four specific field-based pedagogies, which help preservice teachers to both develop an understanding of the complexities of teaching and an awareness of the pedagogies used in the classroom. First, guided observation can be used to assist students as they work through the observation process in the enormously complex setting of schools and classrooms. Second, teaching brief lessons provide students with the opportunity to experience the wide array of teaching responsibilities. Third, opportunities to write about teaching serve as an important component in the development of critically, reflective teachers. Fourth, opportunities for seminars and conversations about the field experiences are important.

Issues with Early Field Experience

Although early field experience has become a part of many teacher education programs and the benefits are great, some researchers have criticized it and written about its flaws (Knowles & Cole, 1996). Moore (2003) suggested that many early field experiences
are limited to procedural activities (e.g. time management, expected teaching and content, and classroom management). The result is a lack of integration of theory and practice (Erdman, 1983). Additionally, Moore recommended that more focus should be on linking what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned.

Applegate (1985) believed there was a difference in expectations about EFE among students, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. Kelleher, Collins and Williams (1995) elaborated by suggesting that students have higher expectations of themselves as part of EFE than faculty do. Additionally, they stated that faculty expectations diminished while student expectations remained the same when students moved beyond observation to pre-teaching and student teaching. Such findings provide the basis for Kelleher et al. to conclude that there is a lack of congruence between role expectation and role performance.

The Task Force on Field Experience Standards established by ATE suggest that more field experiences may not be the answer (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). They stated that “better planned and more deliberate field experiences based on program goals are more likely to influence teacher candidates in positive ways” (p. 14). Similarly, McIntyre et al. (1996) posited that there has been a movement toward teacher education programs that are unified by a theme or model and accompanied by a set of goals. However, they still believed there are questions about what works best in field experiences.

Accreditation and Standards

Many within the education profession acknowledge the role EFE plays in the development of preservice teachers (McIntyre et al. 1996). Because EFE is a valuable experience, accreditation organizations, professional organizations, state licensure
departments and teacher education programs have incorporated EFE into their accreditation standards, licensure requirements, and curriculums, respectively.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed standards that address field experience. Their standard for early field experience stated that through EFE teacher education candidates “develop and demonstrate knowledge, skill, and disposition that assist in student learning” (NCATE, 2002). The standard goes on to state that EFE helps initiate the development of competency that continues throughout the teaching career. EFE development requires collaboration, accountability, an appropriate school-based learning environment, and candidate assessment (NCATE, 2002).

Since being recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an accrediting agency for teacher education programs in September 2003, the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) has gained support (TEAC, 2002b). TEAC’s (2002c) goal is to “support the preparation of competent, caring and qualified professional educators” (paragraph 1). Their goal is accomplished through what is called Quality Principles and Standards for Capacity. The principles and standards are the basis for the accreditation process, which is based upon each teacher education program’s ability to provide sound evidence that the program is adequately accomplishing their goals. Related to EFE, TEAC’s Quality Principles and Standards of Capacity are loosely aligned with NCATE Unit Standard 3 entitled Field Experiences and Clinical Practice. TEAC (2002a) reported that three aspects of their standards align with NCATE’s Field Experience Standard. They are 1) Quality Principle I: Evidence of student learning which includes 1.3 Caring, teaching skill; 2) TEAC Capacity Standard 4.3, specifically 4.3.1 which discusses budgetary and resource allocation; and 3) Teacher Quality Principle II, specifically 2.2 Evidence of valid assessment.
The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (1999) suggested that the TEAC framework is compatible with the most recent NCATE standards. The difference lies in the approach to the accreditation process. NCATE has prescriptive standards against, which all programs are measured. TEAC relies more on the institution to identify and self-assess their teacher education program in a scholarly fashion based upon the TEAC framework (TEAC, 2002b).

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), a professional teacher education association, has developed a set of standards for field experience, which are meant to “correspond with, compliment, and extend the NCATE standards” (Guyton & Byrd, 2000, p. 4). By definition, these field experience standards include early field experiences. ATE’s definition stated that field experience “denotes the entire range of school experiences [and] includes early field experiences to student teaching” (Guyton & Byrd, 2000, p. 15). In doing so, ATE urged teacher education programs to approach all field experiences with similar rigor and expectations (Guyton & Byrd, 2000).

The American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) (2001) standards suggested that teacher education programs in agriculture should be experientially based, developed with stakeholder input, and provided by agricultural education faculty who encourage lifelong learning through reflection and higher order thinking. AAAE (2001) recommend early field experiences that are well planned, sequential, and of high quality; all of which should be consistent with the profession’s conceptual framework. The AAAE EFE standards require a minimum of 40 student contact hours in a diverse setting.
Early Field Experience in Agricultural Education

EFE is an essential component of agricultural teacher education programs (Dobbins & Camp, 2003). Connors and Mundt (2001) discovered that most (54.1%) programs require EFE during the fall semester, while a smaller percentage (29.5%) requires EFE in the spring. McLean and Camp (2000) found the make-up of courses and the way the curriculum was offered varied from institution to institution. Dobbins and Camp (2003), using a panel of experts, developed a comprehensive list of 20 EFE tasks. The panel raised concerns regarding the amount of time necessary for the student to complete the required tasks, as well as the amount of time and cooperation required of the cooperating teacher, and university supervisor to plan for such activities.

McLean and Camp (2000) recommend dialog among professional leaders to determine the content in preservice teacher education programs. Connors and Mundt (2001) suggested that the professional association for teacher educators in agricultural education, the American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE), “discuss the nature of field-based experiences students receive prior to student teaching” (p. 117). The development of standards should provide the incentive for these discussions to occur (McLean & Camp, 2000). Although standards have been developed to include EFE and to improve teacher education, these standards do not outline the specific requirements that should be completed nor provide the technical information on what students are to do as part of EFE (Connors & Mundt, 2001). In addition, McLean and Camp (2000) reported that agricultural education programs use a variety of approaches in offering their curriculum to preservice teachers causing the study of programs and their curricula to be even more difficult.
Conclusion

Early field experience is an important initial component to the teacher education program. It serves several purposes in the areas of career exploration and teacher development and provides a variety of benefits to those involved. It is important that students have available opportunities to explore teaching and develop skills related to becoming a teacher.

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) argued that one flaw in teacher education is the disconnect between coursework and field experiences. EFE is a mechanism to alleviate such a problem. An understanding of the theoretical framework, purposes and impact of EFE, issues with EFE, as well as the associated standards, may aid in addressing such concerns.

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CHAPTER III. A SURVEY OF EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: A NATIONAL DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

A paper prepared for the submission to the Journal of Agricultural Education

Michael S. Retallick and Greg Miller

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of early field experience (EFE) in agricultural teacher education programs nationally. A descriptive census survey of all active agricultural teacher education programs in the country was used for this study. The survey’s overall response rate of 89%, and the fact that nearly all agricultural teacher education programs require EFE indicates that EFE is valued as an important component of teacher education programs. It was discovered that multiple early field experiences are required at multiple classification levels. Many of the similarities regarding EFE requirements seem to end at broad, categorical levels. Most programs report having the requirements; however, the means by which each program fulfills the requirements are considerably different. The primary responsibility for EFE and the associated administrative tasks are placed on faculty within the agricultural teacher education program. Teacher licensure, as well as state and national teacher education accreditation, may influence procedural and minimum requirements established for EFE. This study provides the foundation for further research. Additional research in agricultural teacher education is needed to identify the purposes of EFE, and the means by which those purposes are accomplished.
**Introduction and Theoretical Framework**

Early field experience is “an integral program component” for initial and advanced teacher preparation (NCATE, 2002, p. 27). The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) described early field experience as the range of school experiences that occur prior to student teaching for those students in preservice teacher education (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). The EFE allows preservice teachers to immerse themselves into real classroom settings.

McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) suggested that there is a “lack of a well conceived theoretical base for field experience” (p. 188). However, the American Association of Agricultural Educators (2001) stated that the basis of early field experiences is grounded in experiential learning. Therefore, the work of John Dewey (1938; 1916) and others (Kolb, 1984; and Knowles & Cole, 1994, 1996) in experiential learning provided the theoretical foundation for this study.

Dewey (1938) believed that there is an “organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25) and that the educational impact is dependent on the quality of the experience, and its ability to influence later experiences. He promoted what he called the principle of continuity of experience. Dewey defined continuity of experience as a means by which “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35).

Kolb (1984) argued that people do learn from experience, and that experience-based education has become widely accepted as a method of instruction in higher education. According to Kolb, experience offers “the foundation for an approach to education and
learning as a lifelong process that is soundly based in intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology” (pp. 3-4).

Knowles and Cole (1996) built upon the experiential learning philosophies of Dewey and Kolb, and applied experiential learning theory to field experiences in teacher education. They viewed teacher education as a “lifelong process of continuing growth with preservice programs, including field experiences, providing the contexts for the formal beginnings of career long development” (p. 650).

Knowles and Cole (1994) proposed a cyclical yet spiral framework (Figure 1) for experiential learning, which includes preservice field experiences. The foundation for learning in the model is experience with individual learning and enrichment occurring through the experiential learning process. They believed this process occurs in four stages as students develop, grow, and move on to new experiences. The first stage is personal experience and practice. The second stage is information (internal and external) gathering and documentation followed by the third stage of reflection, analysis and development of personal theories. The final stage is the movement of the student toward informed action.
Background

As introduced and exemplified by various research in the introduction and theoretical framework, early field experience is an important component of the preservice teacher education program. EFE has its theoretical base in experiential learning. Included in the significant research on EFE are the topics of its purposes and benefits, related problems, and modest findings that apply EFE to agricultural teacher education.

Purpose and Benefits of EFE

According to NCATE (2002), the purpose of EFE is to apply knowledge, skills, and disposition in a variety of settings appropriate to the content and level of the student’s program. Kelleher, Collins and Williams (1995) identified three purposes for early field
experience: exploring teaching as a career, melding theory and practice, and developing teaching skills. The purpose of EFE can be accomplished through a variety of early and ongoing school-based opportunities, which could include observing, assisting the cooperating teacher, tutoring students, teaching lessons, and conducting applied research (NCATE, 2002).

EFE provides the student with the opportunity to start thinking like a teacher, as well as experience the role of a teacher, early in his or her academic career (NCATE, 2002). Staffo, Baird, Clavelli, and Green (2002) and Pierce (1996) suggested that EFE provides a context from which students can relate theoretical and foundational coursework. Preservice teachers begin to choose appropriate teaching strategies as they gain understanding of students’ social and cognitive backgrounds (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Pierce (1996) suggested that EFE learning is authentic, and should take place early and regularly throughout preservice training.

McIntyre (1983) mentioned six benefits of early field experience to prospective teachers and teacher education programs. First, participating students learn quicker if they enjoy working with children, and want to continue in the teacher education program. Second, EFE allows teacher education programs to gauge the student’s potential as a teacher. Third, students are able to practice teaching skills prior to student teaching. Fourth, students develop a base of perceptions related to classroom life. Fifth, EFE provides an avenue to improve communication between universities and public schools. Finally, early field experiences accelerate the passage through stages from student to teacher.
Issues with EFE

Although early field experience has become a part of many teacher education programs and the benefits are great, some researchers have raised issues with early field experience. Field experience is “not without flaws and does not escape criticism” (Knowles & Cole, 1996). Moore (2003) suggested that many early field experiences are limited to procedural activities (e.g., time management, grading papers, collecting materials, and classroom management). The result is a lack of integration of theory and practice (Erdman, 1983). Additionally, Moore (2003) argued that more focus should be on linking what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned.

Applegate (1985) alleged that difference in expectations among EFE are those involved in the experience (i.e. preservice teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor). Kelleher et al. (1995) elaborated by suggesting that students have higher expectations of themselves as part of the EFE than do faculty. Additionally, they stated that as students move beyond observation to pre-teaching and teaching, faculty expectations diminished while student expectations remained the same. Such arguments suggest there is a lack of congruence among the goals and expectations of the preservice student, cooperating teacher, and teacher educator (Kelleher et al., 1995).

EFE in Agricultural Teacher Education

EFE is an essential component of agricultural teacher education programs (Dobbins & Camp, 2003). Connors and Mundt (2001) discovered that most (54.1%) programs require the EFE experience during the fall semester, while a smaller percentage (29.5%) requires EFE in the spring. McLean and Camp (2000) found the make-up of courses and the way the
curriculum was offered varied from institution to institution. Similar differences were found in the ways EFE were offered at those institutions. Dobbins and Camp (2003) used a panel of experts to develop a comprehensive list of 20 EFE tasks. The panel raised concerns regarding the amount of time necessary for cooperating teachers and university staff to plan for the EFE tasks and the students to complete them.

McLean and Camp (2000) recommended dialog among professional leaders to determine the content of preservice teacher education programs. Connors and Mundt (2001) suggested that the professional association for teacher educators in agricultural education, the American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE), “discuss the nature of field-based experiences students receive prior to student teaching” (p. 117). The development of standards should provide the incentive for these discussions to occur (McLean & Camp, 2000). Although standards have been developed to include EFE and to improve teacher education, these standards do not outline the specific requirements that should be completed (Connors & Mundt, 2001). The standards also lack the technical information on what students are to accomplish through EFE.

Kelleher et al. (1995) suggested that despite the use and acceptance of early field experience, “there is little substantive evidence regarding either the exact nature or resulting outcomes of such programs” (p. 38). The agricultural education profession faces a similar problem. A review of the literature in the Journal of Agricultural Education found that of the 562 articles published between 1989 and 2003 only three articles (Connors & Mundt, 2001; Dobbins & Camp, 2003; McLean & Camp, 2000) provided any information on the use of early field experience in agricultural teacher education programs. As a result, the extent to
which early field experience has been offered, how it is administered, its requirements, placement restrictions, and internal and external factors that may impact preservice agricultural teacher education is not known.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of early field experience in agricultural teacher education programs nationally. The study focused on five research questions.

1. To what extent is EFE offered as part of agricultural teacher education programs?
2. What are the requirements of EFE?
3. How is EFE administered in agricultural teacher education programs?
4. What are the placement requirements for EFE?
5. What are the internal and external factors that may impact EFE?

**Methods and Procedures**

A descriptive census survey research design was used for this study. The target population was all active agricultural teacher education programs in the United States of America ($N = 82$) identified using the AAAE Directory of University Faculty in Agricultural Education (Dyer, 2003). The teacher education coordinator of each program was identified as the contact person.

The descriptive survey design followed the Tailored Design Method (TDM) established by Dillman (2000). The researcher developed the survey instrument based upon the research questions to be answered. The questions for the questionnaire were developed
using Dillman’s 19 principles for writing survey questions, and principles for developing a questionnaire, respectively.

An 11-member validation panel was used to evaluate the content and face validity of the instrument. Five agricultural teacher educators from around the United States served on the panel, as did six teacher educators from Iowa State University, including representatives in agricultural education, curriculum and instruction, and higher education. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

The questionnaire was field tested for suitability and reliability by ten agricultural teacher education coordinators. The test-retest method was used to measure reliability. Reliability for the instrument was .88.

Data collection followed Dillman’s (2000) survey implementation plan. Dillman recommended four contacts and an additional “special” contact. For this study, the special contact was a final cover letter and survey instrument sent via certified mail. Elements to achieve a high response rate as outlined by Dillman were also used. The data collection process was concluded on July 1, 2004. Surveys were returned from 73 of the 82 programs for a response rate of 89%. No additional follow-up of the non-respondents was conducted since the response rate exceeded the 85% standard established by Linder, Murphy, & Briers (2001).

Results and Findings

Of the agricultural teacher education programs that responded, 40 (55.6%) were 1862 land-grant institutions, five (6.9%) were 1890 land-grant institutions, 26 (36.1%) were regional state institutions, and one (1.4%) was a private institution. The number of faculty
full-time equivalents (FTE) who were associated with the agricultural teacher education program ranged from zero \((n = 2, 2.9\% \text{ of the programs})\) to 7.00 \((n = 1, 1.4\% \text{ of the programs})\). The mode for faculty FTE was 1.00. The mean was 2.27 \((SD = 1.59)\) and the median was 2.00. Most programs \((n = 49, 71.0\%)\) did not have any professional staff associated with their teacher education program. Of the programs that reported having professional staff, the FTE ranged from 0.33 \((n = 1, 5\% \text{ of the programs})\) to 2.0 \((n = 4, 20\%)\). Other programs reported having 0.5 FTE \((n = 1, 5\%)\), .75 FTE \((n = 1, 5\%)\), and 1.0 FTE \((n = 13, 65\%)\).

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent is EFE offered as part of agricultural teacher education programs?*

Of the 73 agricultural teacher education programs that responded, 71 (97.3%) reported offering EFE as part of their curriculum. Nearly all \((n = 69, 97.2\%)\) that offered EFE required it within their agricultural teacher education program.

Respondents reported offering EFE in a variety of ways. Many \((n = 28, 39.4\%)\) programs offered EFE as an imbedded part of another course. Another 20 (28.2%) programs reported using a combination of embedded early field experiences and stand-alone EFE courses. EFE was offered only as a stand-alone course by 15 (21.5%) programs. Other programs \((n = 8, 11.3\%)\) only offered stand-alone courses that were directly linked to another course.

Nearly three-fourths of the programs \((n = 33, 71.7\%)\) offered EFE at multiple collegiate classification (grade) levels. The remaining programs offered EFE only at specific grade levels: sophomore \((n = 3, 6.5\%)\), junior \((n = 4, 8.7\%)\), senior \((n = 6, 13\%)\). Of the 46
programs that responded to the question regarding the offering of EFE to graduate students, 12 (26.1%) stated that EFE was also designed for and offered to graduate students.

**Research Question 2: What are the requirements of EFE?**

Respondents were asked a variety of questions regarding EFE requirements. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the responses to those questions. Nearly all respondents (n = 66, 93%) reported requiring one or more different early field experiences. The number of EFEs that were required ranged from one to 10 experiences with a mean of 2.89 (SD = 1.92). The mode was 2.0 EFE experiences and the median was 2.5.

Table 1.

**Range of EFE requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of different EFEs required</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of credits earned in EFE</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum number of hours required</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>57.93</td>
<td>42.07</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of lessons planned</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of lessons taught</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum number of site visits</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the EFE was offered as a stand-alone course, the respondents were asked to provide the total number of credits for all experiences. The number of EFE credits required
ranged from one to nine with a median of 2.0 and mode of 1.0. Of the 43 programs which responded, 14 (32.6%) offered one credit of EFE, 10 (23.3%) offered two credits, 10 (23.3%) offered three credits, eight (18.6%) offered four credits, and one (2.3%) offered nine credits.

Nearly all respondents \((n = 69, 97.2\%)\) reported having a minimum number of student contact hours required within EFE. For the 69 programs reporting, the minimum number of hours required for an EFE ranged from 4 to 300 hours. The mean number of hours was 57.93 (SD = 42.07). Most programs \((n = 64, 92.8\%)\) required 100 hours or less. Five programs required over 100 hours of EFE (102, 105, 120, 168, and 300 hours). The median number of hours was 50 and the mode was 40.

The number of lessons a preservice teacher was to plan and teach as part of his or her EFE was reported. Most programs \((n = 53, 75.7\%)\) required at least one lesson to be planned as part of the student’s EFE experience. The number of lessons planned ranged from one to 20 with a mean of 4.40 \((SD = 3.74)\). The median was 4.0 and the mode was 2.0. Over three-fourths of the programs \((n = 53, 75.7\%)\) required at least one lesson to be taught as part of the EFE experience. The number of lessons taught ranged from one to eight with a mean of 3.09 \((SD = 1.99)\), a median of 2.0, and a mode of 2.0.

Over half of the agricultural teacher education programs \((n = 40, 57.1\%)\) required a minimum number of EFE site visits to a secondary agricultural education program. Those site visits ranged from one to 25 with two and five visits being the most prevalent number of visits (17% each). The median was 5 visits.

Respondents were asked to identify the grading scale(s) used to report the final grade for EFE. Most programs \((n = 33, 71.7\%)\) offered EFE for a letter grade. In five (10.9%)
programs, EFE was taken on a satisfactory/fail basis. One program (2.2%) offered EFE on a pass/not pass basis. No grade was recorded in two (4.3%) programs. In another five (10.9%) programs, a combination of grading methods was used because multiple experiences were completed.

**Research Question 3:** How is EFE administered in agricultural teacher education programs?

Respondents were asked if an EFE handbook or bulletin was available for preservice teachers. Only 49 (69%) programs that offered EFE have an EFE handbook or bulletin.

The primary responsibilities related to EFE were categorized into the five major administrative tasks. Respondents were asked what type of position (university faculty or staff) was most representative of the individual who had primary responsibility for each of those five EFE tasks. Table 2 provides the percentage of programs whose faculty or staff had primary responsibility for the EFE administrative tasks. Faculty had the primary responsibility for all administrative tasks in nearly all programs.

Table 2.

*Primary responsibility for administrative EFE tasks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% Faculty</th>
<th>% Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the EFE program</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>92.75</td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseeing the EFE program</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>86.96</td>
<td>13.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out the EFE program</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>91.18</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing students in EFE</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>83.82</td>
<td>16.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating EFE</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>89.71</td>
<td>10.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faculty or staff within the agricultural education program may not always have the primary responsibilities related to the five EFE administrative tasks. Table 3 identifies the percentage of agricultural teacher education programs that have primary responsibility for each administrative task. In those cases where agricultural teacher education programs do not have primary administrative responsibility, programs reported that colleges, schools, or departments of education most often have the administrative responsibility. Three programs reported having joint responsibility, and another three programs identified an office or center (Office of Field Experience, Student Teaching Center, and Clinical Studies) as having the primary responsibility for EFE administrative tasks.

Table 3.

Primary administrative responsibility of EFE within agricultural education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% within ag ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the EFE program</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseeing the EFE program</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out the EFE program</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing students in EFE</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating EFE</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each program was asked if an orientation program, supervision training, and/or student assessment training were offered to the individuals involved with EFE. The percentage of teacher education programs that offered orientation programs to university
staff was 28 (40.6%). Orientation programs were offered to cooperating teachers in 32 (47.1%) programs and to EFE students in 57 (81.4%) programs. Only 24 (35.3%) teacher education programs offered supervision training to their college personnel, but over half (n = 37, 53.6%) offered supervision training to the cooperating teacher. Student assessment training was offered to those individuals involved with EFE in 30 (42.9%) programs and to cooperating teachers in 35 (50%) programs.

**Research Question 4: What are the placement requirements for EFE?**

Respondents were asked whether or not preservice teachers were required to conduct their EFE within an agricultural education program. In nearly all agricultural teacher education programs (n = 66, 93%), students were required to complete the EFE within a middle or high school agricultural education program.

Most programs (n = 50, 70.4%) have restrictions on where students can complete the required EFE. Respondents were asked to list the placement restrictions. The restrictions listed by the respondents could be categorized into two categories: student and program restrictions. The most prevalent student restriction (n = 16, 32%) was that students could not complete their EFE at their “home” school or with their former agricultural teacher. In some cases (n = 4, 8%), students were required to complete at least one early field experience in the program where they intended to do their student teaching.

The program restrictions listed by the respondents tended to be based upon the policies and procedures of the teacher education program. Half of the teacher education programs (n = 25) had either developed a list, or had in some way identified approved programs where EFE could be completed. Those lists were either approved by the
agricultural teacher education program, or approved jointly by the agricultural teacher education program and the state department of education agricultural education staff. In two cases, the EFE site was identified as a professional school by the university teacher education program. The cooperating program could be either a single- or multiple-teacher program, but it must be a “high quality,” comprehensive program with an effective teacher.

Respondents were asked whether or not there were minimum qualifications for teachers to serve as cooperating teachers. Most programs \((n = 45, 64.3\%)\) reported having minimum qualifications for teachers to serve as EFE cooperating teachers. Respondents were asked to list the minimum qualifications. A minimum number of years of experience was a common minimum qualification \((n = 30, 66.7\%)\). However, the minimum number of years ranged from two to five. Another minimum qualification was that the cooperating teacher must have also been in the current position for more than one year \((n = 7, 15.6\%)\). Some programs specified that cooperating teachers must have earned a master’s degree \((n = 7, 15.6\%)\), be tenured \((n = 3, 6.7\%)\), and must have teacher certification in the state \((n = 5, 11.1\%)\). In some instances \((n = 5, 11.1\%)\), the cooperating teacher must either be a member, or provide service to the professional association. The approval of the principal was required in three \((6.7\%)\) programs. One program required the cooperating teacher to complete a three-credit-hour course. Some programs \((n = 8, 17.8\%)\) reported requiring the teacher to either be part of the student teaching program, or meet similar requirements as those who serve as cooperating teachers for student teaching.

Teacher education programs also reported having a few less tangible requirements. These less tangible requirements focused on the type of program for which the cooperating
teacher was responsible. The general expectation was that the program should be “excellent.” Respondents used terms like “well-rounded,” “complete,” and “comprehensive” to define an excellent program, which means that programs should be in good standing; have met state standards; and have a balance of classroom/laboratory, supervised agricultural experiences, and FFA.

**Research Question 5: What are the internal and external factors that affect EFE?**

Other factors may drive the extent to which EFE is developed and utilized within the agricultural teacher education program. This study focused on two internal factors (i.e. admission to teacher education and teacher licensure) and a single external factor, which was accreditation.

Respondents were asked a question about EFE as a requirement for admission to teacher education and for teacher licensure. Thirty-eight (53.5%) programs reported requiring EFE for admission to teacher education. Respondents were asked to list the EFE requirements necessary for admission to teacher education. The most common response \((n = 15, 39.5\%)\) was that students must pass the course (stand-alone and/or embedded) related to EFE. One respondent reported that students must earn a grade of C or better in the practicum courses. Other respondents \((n = 10, 26.3\%)\) listed a specific number of hours of EFE required prior to admission. Those hours ranged from 10 to 260 hours. Within that range, programs reported requiring 24, 30, 40, 50, 60, and 100 hours of EFE prior to admission to teacher education. The 260 hours reported by one program seemed to be an outlier.

When asked whether EFE was required for teacher licensure in their state, 42 (59.2%) programs reported that EFE was required for teacher licensure. Respondents were asked to
list the EFE requirements for state licensure. Many programs \((n = 32, 76.2\%)\) reported that students must have some type of pre-student teaching or public school contact/experience prior to licensure. Others \((n = 4, 12.5\%)\) reported that EFE was part of the core course that was required for licensure. A few programs \((n = 3, 9.4\%)\) indicated that NCATE standards drive their licensure. Finally, many state licensure requirements \((n = 23, 71.9\%)\) were more specific in that they identified the exact amount of time required. One \((4.4\%)\) program required five days of EFE, while other programs \((n = 22, 95.6\%)\) required a range of hours. The minimum number of hours was 30, and the maximum number of hours was 300. Most \((n = 20, 62.5\%)\) state licensure requirements for EFE were less than 100 hours.

An external factor that may affect EFE was accreditation of the teacher education program. Only two teacher education programs \((2.8\%)\) reported having no accreditation. Many teacher education programs \((n = 24, 33.8\%)\) reported only having NCATE accreditation, and no programs were solely accredited by TEAC. Nearly half \((n = 33, 46.5\%)\) of the teacher education programs had multiple accreditation. Of the programs that have multiple accreditation, nearly all \((n = 30, 90.9\%)\) reported having NCATE and state accreditation. Other programs reported having NCATE and TEAC \((n = 1, 3.0\%)\); TEAC and state \((n = 1, 3.0\%)\); or NCATE, TEAC, and state \((n = 1, 3.0\%)\) accreditation. Some programs \((n = 12, 16.9\%)\) reported being accredited solely by other entities. In those cases, the programs were accredited by state commissions or professional standards boards, which focused on credentialing, preparation, or standards and practices.
Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The conclusions presented here provide a generalized profile of EFE in agricultural education in the United States. The census data from this study serve as a benchmark that faculty can use to compare their program to a national norm. The results will most certainly develop a better understanding of the extent to which EFE can be used and implemented in agricultural education. Such an understanding will serve as the basis for future planning, implementation, and evaluation of early field experiences. This profile may also serve as a stimulus for AAAE to improve EFE in agricultural education.

Using the results of this study, the following is a profile of the typical EFE in agricultural education.

- EFE is valued as an important component of teacher education programs.
- Early field experience is a required component, which is offered as multiple experiences and at multiple collegiate classification (grade) levels.
- The experience is required to take place within an agricultural education program.
- Programs require a minimum number of EFE contact hours, which in most cases is 40.
- A minimum number of lessons are required to be planned (mode = 2) and taught (mode = 2) as part of EFE.
- Students have restrictions on where they can complete EFE.
- Agricultural education programs offer EFE orientation programs to their students.
- Programs have minimum qualifications for teachers to serve as cooperating teachers.
- Faculty within the agricultural teacher education program have the primary responsibility for the administration of EFE.
Teacher licensure, as well as state and national teacher education accreditation, influences procedural and minimum requirements established for EFE.

Many of the similarities regarding EFE requirements seem to end at broad, categorical levels. Most programs report having the requirements; however, the means by which each program fulfills the requirements vary.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to learn more about the early field experiences that are offered in agricultural education. This research should address the following questions.

1. How do other programs, secondary teacher education and pre-professional, utilize EFE?
2. What is the purpose(s) of EFE within agricultural teacher education, and by what means is this purpose(s) accomplished?
3. What should be the purpose(s) and by what means should this purpose(s) be accomplished?
4. What are the desired and expected outcomes of EFE?
5. To what extent does EFE go beyond procedural activities?
6. To what extent does or should reflexivity play a role in EFE?

It would be valuable to replicate this study in five years to determine what changes have occurred related to EFE. This study could also be replicated in other secondary teacher education programs nationally.

References


CHAPTER IV. A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY OF EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

A paper prepared for the submission to the Journal of Agricultural Education

Michael S. Retallick and Greg Miller

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the means by which early field experience is implemented within the context of agricultural teacher education. A content analysis using course syllabi, course packets, assignments, and/or handbooks obtained directly from each program’s teacher education coordinator was determined to be the most appropriate method to accomplish the purpose and objectives of this study. Thirty-eight (46.34%) of the 82 agricultural teacher education programs responded by providing 57 unique, usable EFE documents. A major finding of this study was that EFE activities were regularly identified as purposes of EFE. For example, over three-fourths (76.3%) of the programs actually refer to observation as both a purpose and an activity when in actuality it should be considered only an activity. The study found that the most common EFE purpose articulated in EFE documents was career exploration. Secondary purposes of EFE were the activities of teaching lessons and assisting in the classroom. No programs use EFE as a means to conduct applied research. The primary activities to achieve the purposes of EFE were observation, practice teaching, and reflection. It could be concluded from this study that there is a lack of communication and integration of theory and practice in EFE.

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Early field experiences (EFE) include the range of school experiences that occur prior to student teaching for those students in preservice teacher education (Guyton & Byrd, 2000).
A variety of well-developed early field experiences enable students to immerse themselves into the complex world of teaching, and serve as a means for students to begin to think as teachers (Carter & Anders, 1996). The primary components that impact the effectiveness of a comprehensive EFE program include:

- EFE standards and accreditation,
- purposes and activities associated with EFE, and
- interaction of EFE participants.

EFE Standards and Accreditation

Educational reform efforts have influenced both accrediting and professional organizations to develop standards that specifically refer to and affect early field-based experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has developed such a standard for the teacher education profession (NCATE, 2002) as has the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). The American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) is an example of a subject-based organization that has incorporated EFE into its standards. These professional organizations and associations often provide a broad conceptual framework for teacher education and its related components. They also provide specific expectations in the form of standards. Those frameworks and standards provide the guidelines and structure for teacher education program development and the accreditation process.

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education

In teacher education, NCATE has been the primary accrediting agency for teacher education since 1954 (AACTE, 1999). NCATE has been the principal national accreditation...
agency and has provided direction through its standards and framework for the development and evaluation of nearly all teacher education programs. The development of a conceptual framework provides the underlying theoretical and empirical foundation for the individual teacher education program (NCATE, 2002). The conceptual framework enables the articulation of a shared vision and serves as a communication piece among all stakeholders. NCATE defines standards as “written expectations for meeting a specified level of performance” (p. 57). Both the conceptual framework and standards influence early field experiences.

NCATE (2002) defines field experiences as “a variety of early and ongoing field-based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, and/or conduct research. Field experiences may occur in off-campus settings such as schools, community centers, or homeless shelters” (p. 53). Standard 3, entitled Field Experiences and Clinical Practice, states that EFE enables teacher education candidates to “develop and demonstrate knowledge, skill, and dispositions necessary to help all students” (p. 25). The standard is met when candidates are able to apply and reflect on their “content, professional and pedagogical knowledge, skill, and dispositions in a variety of settings with students and adults” (p. 26). The standard goes on to state that EFE helps initiate the development of competencies necessary for individuals to begin and continue careers in teaching. EFE development requires accountability, an appropriate environment, as well as collaboration between teacher education programs and cooperating schools on program design, implementation, and candidate assessment.
**Association of Teacher Educators**

ATE defines field experience as all school-based experiences, which occur prior to student teaching (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). ATE has developed a set of standards for field experience, which are meant to “correspond with, compliment, and extend the NCATE standards” (p. 4). ATE has established a set of 12 standards, which focus specifically on field experiences. ATE standards focus on the context and culture of the field experience; diversity; reflection and analysis; selection, preparation, and assignment of the teacher educators and cooperating teachers; and assessment of the experiences.

**American Association of Agricultural Educators**

The *National Standards for Teacher Education in Agriculture* provide a conceptual framework for high quality field experiences in agricultural teacher education (AAAE, 2001). AAAE standards suggest that teacher education programs in agriculture should be “grounded in experience-based knowledge developed with input from stakeholders” (Standard 1) and provided by agricultural education faculty who encourage the “development of reflection, higher order thinking, and professional disposition of teacher candidates” (Standard 4b). AAAE recommends early field experiences that are well planned, sequential, of high quality, and consistent with the profession’s conceptual framework. AAAE standards recommend that field experiences should be planned and delivered in a diverse school-based agricultural education program where preservice teachers can observe, journal, and reflect on the interrelationship of the tripartite approach to agricultural education (i.e. instruction, FFA and SAE). AAAE goes on to recommend an early field experience designed and
implemented in concert with schools, cooperating teachers, and agencies, which requires at least 40 hours of student contact in a diverse school-based setting.

Purpose and Activities Associated with EFE

A review of the literature identifies a variety of purposes and activities related to EFE. These include the melding of theory into practice (Kelleher, Collins, & Williams, 1995; NCATE, 2002; Staffo, Baird, Clavelli, & Green, 2002); applying knowledge (NCATE, 2002; Pierce, 1996); developing teaching skills (NCATE, 2002; Kelleher et al., 1995; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; McIntyre, 1983); transitioning from student to teacher (NCATE, 2002; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; McIntyre, 1983); and exploring teaching as a career (Kelleher et al., 1995; McIntyre, 1983). In agricultural education another reason for EFE is to study the interrelationship among the three components of agricultural education (classroom, FFA, and SAE) (AAAE, 2001).

NCATE (2002) specifically lists five activities, which can be used to fulfill the purpose of EFE: observing, assisting the cooperating teacher, tutoring students, providing instruction, and conducting applied research. EFE provides students with authentic learning, which should take place early and often. However, McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) posit that increased practice without reflection and analysis does not lead to professional growth.

Interaction of EFE Participants

Several researchers have studied the interpersonal relationships involved with field experiences. Issues of role definition and expectations are critical to any discussion about the relationships within field experiences (Knowles & Cole, 1996). For the student to learn from the experience and develop a deeper understanding about the profession, interaction with
peers, the cooperating teacher, and the teacher educator (the triad) are vital (McIntyre et al., 1996). Close cooperation among the triad ensures that the appropriate kind of school environments and supportive supervising practices are provided, and that they are conducive to fostering the optimum levels of personal and professional growth for the preservice teacher.

The influences of the cooperating teacher on a preservice student are great (McIntyre, et al., 1996). In order for EFE to be successful and beneficial, classroom teachers must be able to shift to the role of teacher educator (Chastko, 1993). Too often preservice teachers fail to appropriately interact with cooperating teachers. Because it is difficult for cooperating teachers to make such a shift, communication is generally brief and impersonal and substantive discussions and conflict are generally avoided (Killian & McIntyre, 1983). It is because of these issues that McIntyre et al. (1996) concluded that a course on instructional supervision can make a significant difference on the type and appropriateness of feedback given to preservice teachers. Many times cooperating teachers need training on how to promote an atmosphere built upon communication, reflection, and feedback.

Early field experience supervision is irregular at best, especially by campus-based supervisors (Carter & Anders, 1996). In addition, there seems to be a natural conflict among the university supervisor, and preservice and cooperating teachers. With time as a major issue for the university supervisors, the lack of supervision raises the question of how EFE can be adequately evaluated. University supervisors seem to be the least understood component in the triad and generally receive the most criticism (McIntyre et al., 1996). Their level of influence may vary depending upon their degree of involvement, the extent to which
they communicate, their ability to define and articulate program goals, and their broader perspective and approach to teaching (Carter & Anders, 1996). This conflict is in part because of the perceived power of the university supervisor, his or her level of self-efficacy as it relates to the field experience program, and the difference in knowledge base related to teaching (McIntyre et al., 1996).

An often overlooked and undervalued component of EFE is peer interaction. Because students participating in EFE have limited experiences, the challenge is to find ways for them to understand and make meaning of those experiences (Knowles & Cole, 1996). McIntyre et al. (1996) recommended that cohort groups be used in teacher education programs, which allow students to move through courses and field experiences together. Such interaction provides students the opportunity to explore various meanings and contexts, which provides a communal perspective and breaks down the individualistic barriers associated with teaching. On-campus discussions and individual conferences where students can dialogue with other students, as well as converse with cooperating teachers and university faculty, plays a significant role in the development of beginning teachers (Carter & Anders, 1996).

Efforts to define the roles and interactions of those involved will aid in the elimination of many issues surrounding this component of EFE. The largest problem is the lack of interaction between the institution and cooperating site (McIntyre et al., 1996). McIntyre et al. continued by stating that too often preservice teachers fail to appropriately interact with cooperating teachers, or come to an agreement as to the responsibility of each participant. Many times the relationship between the university and the cooperating school is one of congeniality instead of cooperation (McIntyre et al., 1996). Another problem is the
differences in expectations among the student, cooperating teacher, and teacher educator (Applegate, 1985; Kelleher et al., 1995). The difference in expectations creates confusion and further complicates measuring the educational value of EFE (Kelleher et al., 1995).

In this section, the conceptual framework for EFE was presented. The conceptual framework included the standards associated with NCATE, ATE, and AAAE, the purpose and activities associated with EFE, and the role and interaction among the triad and peers. In the next section, the theoretical framework of EFE is presented.

**Theoretical Framework of EFE**

In agricultural teacher education, early field experiences are grounded in experiential learning (AAAE, 2001). Knowles and Cole (1996), believe teacher education is a “lifelong process of continuing growth with preservice programs, including field experiences, providing the context for the formal beginnings of career long development” (p. 650). Using the works of John Dewey (1916, 1938) and David Kolb (1984) as their basis, Knowles and Cole (1994, 1996) have applied experiential learning philosophies to field experiences in teacher education.

Knowles & Cole (1994) propose a cyclical yet spiral framework (Figure 1) for experiential learning, which includes preservice field experiences. The foundation for learning in the model is experience with individual learning and enrichment occurring through the experiential learning process. Knowles and Cole believe this process occurs in four stages as students develop, grow, and move on to new experiences. The first stage is personal experience and practice. The second stage is information (internal and external) gathering and documentation followed by a third stage of reflection, analysis, and
development of personal theories. The final stage is the movement of the student toward informed action.

![Figure 1. Knowles and Cole’s (1994) experiential learning cycle/spiral](image)


Early field experiences are the first formal contextual experiences for students aspiring to become teachers. EFE provides the initial exposure and springboard for the student to develop into a critical thinker and life-long learner, who is continually attempting to develop professionally. Knowles and Cole (1994) promote this through their experiential learning cycle/spiral. Professional organizations have developed standards to improve all aspects of teacher education including experiential learning components like EFE.
However, Connors & Mundt (2001) state that these standards do not outline the specific requirements to be completed, nor do they provide the technical information on what students are to complete as part of EFE. Furthermore, within agricultural teacher education, there is no documentation as to the explained purposes of EFE or the means by which the purposes are achieved. There is no information regarding the relationship between the purposes of EFE, and the means by which they are achieved. In addition, there is no literature regarding the intended interactions used to accomplish the purposes of EFE.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to describe the implementation of early field experience within the context of agricultural teacher education. The study focused on four research objectives.

1. Describe the explained purposes of EFE programs.
2. Describe the means by which the purposes are achieved.
3. Explore the relationship between the explained purposes of EFE, and the means by which the purposes are achieved.
4. Determine if interaction among the teacher education triad is expected and/or defined.

**Methods**

Existing sources were at the heart of the material being analyzed (Hodson, 1999). Therefore, content analysis was determined to be the most appropriate method to accomplish the purpose and objectives of this study. Krippendorff (1980) defined content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 21). The documents used in the study also contribute to the knowledge base by providing
additional insight on complex phenomena (Hodson, 1999). Stone, Dunphy, Smith, and Ogilvie (1966) identified education as one field where it would be appropriate to utilize content analysis.

The framework of content analysis is based on six basic concepts which include: 1) “the data as communicated to the analyst, 2) the context of the data, 3) how the analyst’s knowledge partitions his reality, 4) the target of a content analysis, 5) inference as the basic intellectual task, and 6) validity as ultimate criteria of success” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 26).

Documents for this study were requested as part of a national survey on EFE within agricultural teacher education. The question on the survey stated “As a primary source for further study, we are asking that you provide EFE handbook(s), bulletin(s), syllabi or other documents used for your required early field experience program.” Respondents were provided with three methods by which to provide the materials: 1) hard copy sent via US Postal Service (mailing label was provided), 2) electronic copy e-mailed (e-mail address provided), or 3) material could be accessed via the World Wide Web (respondents were asked to provide the URL).

Thirty-eight (46.34%) of the 82 active agricultural teacher education programs that responded by providing 57 unique, usable EFE documents. Although a request for materials was made to all agricultural teacher education programs, only the materials provided by the coordinators via the request were included in the study. The documents that were analyzed were not limited to those courses offered by agricultural education program faculty and staff. McLean and Camp (2000) suggested all documents inside and outside of agricultural education should be included in future studies. Based upon their experiences, they argued
that including the general education courses allowed for a more complete picture of the agricultural teacher education program.

A comparison of early and late respondents (Linder, Murphy, & Briers, 2001) was made on all 34 variables involved in this study. Using Chi-square, no statistically significant differences between early and late respondents were found with 31 of the 34 variables. There was a significant difference between early and late respondents related to written objectives \((p = .03)\), placement restrictions \((p = .03)\), and journaling \((p = .04)\). Late respondents were more likely to have written objectives and require journaling, while early respondents were more likely to have placement restrictions. The results of the study can be generalized to the larger agricultural teacher education population for 31 of the 34 variables. The reader is cautioned to only generalize to those programs in the study for three variables: written objectives, placement restrictions, and journaling.

Establishing the authenticity of the coding document and the validity of its contents are a research issue with content analysis (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). This study used course materials, which included course syllabi, course packets, assignments, and/or handbooks. The materials were obtained directly from each program’s teacher education coordinator. This method of securing the documents ensures authenticity and validity of the documents analyzed.

Krippendorff (1980) identified three types of reliability: stability, reproducibility, and accuracy. Stability is the consistency of the process and addresses intra-observer inconsistencies. Stability refers to the extent to which “the results of content classification are invariant over time” (Weber, 1990, p. 17). The test-retest method was the reliability
design suggested by Krippendorff and was used in this study. A random sample of the
documents from 10 (26.3%) programs were recoded and compared to the original coding to
determine the consistency of the process. Intra-observer reliability was calculated to be .95.
A coefficient above .90 is acceptable in all situations (Neuendorf, 2002).

Reproducibility is the ability of the process to be recreated at different locations and
by other researchers (Krippendorff, 1980). Inter-observer inconsistencies and inter-observer
disagreements are addressed through reproducibility. The process to ensure reproducibility
began with the development of the coding instrument (Hodson, 1999). A complete,
comprehensive coding instrument was initially developed based upon a review of the
literature and the purpose and objectives of the study. A review of the documents to be
coded was also made to ensure that an all-inclusive coding instrument was developed
(Neuendorf, 2002). The review of documents revealed that many programs report activities
as purposes of EFE. As a result, although the literature differentiates between broader
purposes and associated activities, activities were included as purposes on the coding
instrument.

Special effort was made in developing the coding document to prevent the coder from
making inferences while coding, which would erode reliability (Hodson, 1999).
Supplemental coding protocol was developed and reviewed regularly as suggested by
Hodson. The coding document was reviewed by a panel of teacher educators for face
validity.

The reliability design used to address inter-observer reliability was the test-test
design. One teacher education professional familiar with EFE coded the documents of 10
(26.3%) randomly selected programs. Reproducibility reliability of the first teacher educator was found to be .75. The reliability coding was calculated prior to resolving any coding disagreements (Weber, 1990). The inter-coding process exposed a common threat to validity: inadequate coder training (Neuendorf, 2002). Therefore, initial coding disagreements were addressed and improvements were made to the coding instrument. Emphasis was made to limit the amount of assumptions made while coding the documents. After making changes, a second teacher educator coded a set of 10 (26.3%) documents from randomly selected programs. The changes improved the reliability coefficient to .83. The principal investigator was responsible for coding all data. The reproducibility coefficient for this study was reported to ensure the coding scheme did not reflect the subjectivity of only one individual (Neuendorf, 2002).

Accuracy is the strongest form of reliability (Weber, 1990) and refers to the extent to which classification corresponds to established standards and norms, and yields what it is supposed to (Krippendorff, 1980). Because standards and norms have not been developed to analyze texts in agricultural education, accuracy could not be established. Weber stated accuracy is seldom used in reliability assessment for this reason.

**Findings**

Documents related to early field experiences were collected from 38 agricultural teacher education programs. These programs represented 1862 land-grant institutions ($n = 25, 65.8\%$), 1890 land-grant institutions ($n = 2, 5.3\%$), and regional/state institutions ($n = 11, 28.9\%$). The 38 teacher education programs in this study provided a total of 57 usable documents. The combination of documents that represent each program is found in Table 1.
The largest proportion of programs either provided an EFE handbook \((n = 10, 26.3\%)\), or one or more syllabi \((n = 14, 36.8\%)\). Seven programs \((18.4\%)\) only provided their EFE forms. Six programs \((15.8\%)\) provided both their EFE handbook and syllabi, and one program \((2.6\%)\) provided a combination of syllabi and forms.

Table 1.

*Documents provided by each agricultural teacher education program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handbook only</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus or syllabi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms only</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabi and Forms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook and Syllabus</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was determined from the documents that 25 \((65.8\%)\) agricultural education programs offered EFE, while six \((15.8\%)\) programs received their EFE programming from outside agricultural teacher education. The documents of the remaining seven \((18.4\%)\) programs did not provide sufficient information to determine whether they offered EFE within or outside of the agricultural education program. Only nine of the 38 programs \((23.7\%)\) referred to the institution’s conceptual framework for teacher education.
Explained Purposes of EFE Programs

Three-quarters (n = 28, 75.7%) of the programs provided a purpose statement for the early field experiences offered through their teacher education program. However, more than half (55.3%) of the programs provided written objectives for the EFE. A single purpose for the EFE was identified in five (13.2%) programs, and no EFE purpose statement was identified in the documents of five (13.2%) programs. The remaining programs (n = 28, 73.7%) listed multiple purposes for EFE.

Table 2 provides the frequencies for each of the explained purposes of EFE. The most common purpose was career exploration (n = 22, 57.9%). Less than half of the programs identified instruction (n = 17, 44.7%) and assistance in the classroom (n = 14, 36.8%) as a purpose for EFE. Only six (15.8%) programs identified tutoring as a purpose for EFE. No programs identified conducting applied research as a purpose of EFE. Nearly three-fourths (n = 29, 76.3%) actually identified the activity of observation as a purpose for EFE.
Table 2.

*Explained purpose of EFE (N = 38 programs)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career exploration</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction (teaching lessons)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance in the classroom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct applied research</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation (Activity)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means by which the EFE Purposes are Achieved

It was discovered that less than half \( n = 16, 42.1\% \) of the programs in the study offered multiple field experiences. An on-campus component tied to the EFE was incorporated into 18 \( 47.4\% \) of the EFE programs. Only 13 \( 34.2\% \) programs restricted the placement of their students who plan to participate in EFE. Four \( 10.5\% \) programs had no restrictions and the remaining programs \( n = 19, 50\% \) did not disclose whether there were restrictions on the placement of their students.

Seven potential activities were identified to achieve the intended purposes of the EFE (Table 3). Four \( 10.5\% \) programs identified a single activity as the means to achieve their purpose(s). Three \( 7.9\% \) programs did not identify any activities within their documents, and the remaining 31 \( 81.6\% \) programs identified multiple activities to achieve the
purpose(s) of their EFEs. Fifteen (39.5%) programs required a portfolio as part of their EFE.

A direct connection between the field experience and coursework on campus was identified in half \((n = 19, 50.0\%)\) of the programs.

Nearly all \((n = 35, 92.1\%)\) programs used observation as an activity within EFE. More than one-half of the programs used practice teaching \((n = 25, 65.8\%)\) and reflection \((n = 23, 60.5\%)\) as activities. Less than one-half of the programs identified interviewing \((n = 14, 36.8\%)\) and journaling \((n = 31.6\%)\) as EFE activities. Less than one-quarter \((n = 9, 23.7\%)\) of the programs asked students to conduct any form of evaluation or assessment as an EFE activity.

Table 3.

Activities used as a means of achieving the purpose of EFE \((N = 38\) programs\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice teaching</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect materials</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship between EFE Purposes and Activities

The relationship between the explained purpose of EFE and the activities used to accomplish the purpose was explored. Frequencies between the EFE purpose and EFE activity are listed (Table 4). The frequency and percentage reported represent the number of programs that used that specific activity as a means to accomplish the purpose. No program identified conducting applied research as a purpose of EFE, and therefore, it is not represented in the table.

When the program’s purpose was either to assist or instruct, the same three activities (observation, practice teaching, and reflection) were most commonly used. When the purpose was exploration, the most common activities were observation, journaling, practice teaching, and reflection. Observation, practice teaching, reflection, and evaluation were the most common activities when tutoring was an identified purpose of EFE. For those programs that identified observation as a purpose, the most common activities were observing, practice teaching, and reflecting.
Table 4.

*Frequencies between EFE purposes and EFE activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Instruct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect Materials</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Teaching</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intended Interactions Within EFE**

Using the documents provided by each program, effort was made to determine whether the documents actually defined the role of each individual involved in the triad. Nearly three-fourths \( (n = 28, 73.7\%) \) of the programs defined the role of the pre-service teacher within the EFE experience. Less than a quarter \( (n = 9, 23.7\%) \) of the programs described the role of the cooperating teacher, and only four \( (10.5\%) \) programs provided a description of the expected role of the teacher educator within the experience.

Just as important in the developmental process as defining the role of the triad was the articulation of the expected interactions among the preservice student and their peers, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor. Less than half \( (n = 16, 42.1\%) \) of the
programs provided any documentation as to the expected interaction between the cooperating teacher and the preservice student. Nine (23.7%) programs incorporated interaction with peers into the EFE. Only eight (21.1%) programs intended for any interaction to take place between the university supervisor and the pre-service teacher.

**Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

This study supports the findings of Erdman (1983) who posited that there is a lack of integration of theory and practice; and Moore (2003) who suggested not enough effort is focused on linking what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned. First, no programs referred to the melding of theory into practice, or the possibility of conducting applied research. Second, the development and utilization of critical thinking skills like reflection, evaluation, and journaling were not prevalent throughout the teacher education programs studied, which also supports the findings of Moore. Third, although observation is actually a means of achieving several EFE purposes, agricultural teacher education programs referred to it as both a purpose and an activity. Overall, EFE seems to be more focused on procedural activities and less on the development of the student into a critically reflective teacher.

The largest problem with field experiences is the lack of communication (McIntyre et al., 1996). Based upon the findings of this study, it could be concluded that agricultural teacher education programs have a similar problem nationally. Perhaps this could be an area of further research. With less than 25% of programs referring to their institution’s conceptual framework, there is a need for agricultural teacher education programs to better articulate and communicate their conceptual framework. The purposes and activities expected of EFE students must also be articulated in EFE documents. Whether it is in the form of a handbook
or a course syllabus, the role of each individual in the triad, as well as the expected interactions, should be communicated. There is a need for consistency within the documents and experiences expected within EFE, which should be developed based upon sound research findings and agreed upon principles. With that said, the authors do caution teacher education programs to retain some degree of program flexibility. Keheller et al. (1995) suggested that EFE should be well-defined and well-developed, yet maintain enough flexibility to meet the individual differences of the students.

The study raised other research questions.

1. Is there an available framework to ensure EFE programs are properly developed and are of quality?

2. Are there any commonalities in the purposes and activities among those programs that offer multiple EFE experiences?

3. Based upon the findings of this study, are the relationships between the purpose of EFE and the activities appropriate for agricultural education?

4. Are the identified purposes, which were used in the paper appropriate for agricultural teacher education programs?

5. Are students in agricultural teacher education programs required to do other activities beyond those identified in the literature?

Perhaps more thought and effort should go into documenting EFE. The focus of EFE should be on the identification of the purposes of EFE as cited in the literature followed by a listing of appropriate activities. The activities should not be limited to only procedural
activities as EFE is an optimum opportunity to initiate and/or continue the development of life-long learning skills.

References


CHAPTER V. A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

A paper prepared for submission to the *Action in Teacher Education*

Michael S. Retallick and Greg Miller

Abstract

A review of literature revealed that a comprehensive model focusing on the structure and content of early field experiences (EFE) in teacher education was an important element missing from the literature. The primary purpose of this study was to synthesize the literature related to the structure and content of EFE. A model with three components was developed to depict the structure and content of EFE. The first component is the foundation, which consists of teacher education standards and a conceptual framework. The second represents the organization of EFE, and consists of different types of experiences, placement, and creation of EFE documents. The third level of the model is the implementation of EFE, which addresses interaction, learning outcomes, and learning strategies. The model provides the structure for a variety of early field experiences, yet allows for individual flexibility while maintaining continuity among programs. The model provides a framework for the development, reorganization, and/or evaluation of EFE.

Introduction and Background

New standards for student achievement have initiated debate about teacher quality, and its impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999). This debate, in part, has evolved into an education reform movement, which includes teacher education, reexamination of teacher training and the certification process. The teacher education reform movement has been modeled after student achievement reform with a focus on standards,
testing, and accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) urged those involved to get serious about developing and enforcing standards for teacher preparation. This emphasis on improving teacher preparation has impacted all aspects of teacher education including early field experiences (EFE).

Teacher preparation programs should provide a foundation for continual learning about teaching and develop a greater focus on creating high-quality clinical learning experiences (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). It is imperative that preservice teachers develop an understanding that the world of teaching is complex. Such an understanding will lead to better analysis of the teaching and learning processes (McIntyre et al., 1996).

The ultimate goal of early field experiences is to prepare preservice teachers to enter field settings knowing what they can accomplish, what they can expect to learn, and how they should conduct themselves (Carter & Anders, 1996). The teaching profession expects teachers to enter the field able to interpret what they see, discern what is being accomplished in the classroom, identify problems to be addressed, and talk ethically and professionally about their observations and experiences. If students are unable to function at this level, Carter and Anders suggest the consequences can be embarrassing for all involved.

Field experiences are needed as means to transition from an academic to a field-based environment for learning (Carter & Anders, 1996). Carter and Anders posited that the skills students have developed in the academic world (i.e. reading books, writing papers, and cramming for exams) are considerably different than the skills needed to learn from their
own teaching and field experiences. Field experiences are a prime opportunity for preservice teachers to develop an experiential understanding of the students they will be teaching as well as provide an opportunity to foster appropriate teaching strategies (Knowles & Cole, 1996).

The importance of field experiences has not been disputed among educators (Guyton & Byrd, 2000). At issue is the degree to which field experiences vary among teacher education programs, and the impact such variance has on the effectiveness of EFE. Hudson, Bergin, and Chayst (1993) identified five issues impacting the effectiveness of EFE. The issues were 1) lack of quality control, 2) lack of common goals among the triad, 3) limited learning because of the lack of experiences from which preservice teachers have to compare, 4) contradiction between what is taught on campus and the practices often observed in the classroom, and 5) limited multicultural opportunities. Because of such issues, Ducharme and Ducharme (1996) identified the need for research on the structure and content of EFE programs.

A comprehensive model focusing on early field experiences in teacher education is an important element missing from the literature. Such a model would provide a basis for the systematic and consistent development of EFE within teacher education programs. The model would provide a foundation for a variety of early field experiences, yet allow for the inclusion of the major EFE components that provide continuity among programs (Guyton & Byrd, 2000).
Purpose and Procedures

The primary purpose of this theoretical investigation was to synthesize the literature related to the structure and content of EFE programs. A second purpose was to develop a model depicting the structure and content of EFE programs.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Education Abstracts were the primary databases used to find articles focusing on early field experience. Articles were gathered from the following sources: *Action in Teacher Education, Childhood Education, Journal of Agricultural Education, Journal of Education for Teaching, Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, Journal of Teacher Education, Teacher and Teacher Education, The Teacher Educator, Teaching and Teacher Education, and The High School Journal.* An online library catalog search was conducted at a Midwestern Doctoral Extensive Research Institution to identify all holdings related to early field experience. The search yielded books and other sources not indexed in ERIC and Education Abstracts.

The analysis of information was conducted in two stages. In the initial stage, documents that addressed issues related to either the structure or content of EFE were selected for analysis. The examination of research included a review of findings, implications, conclusions, and recommendations made by researchers and theorists.

The second stage centered on assessing, reorganizing, and interpreting the existing knowledge (Marsh, 1991). As this stage unfolded, the materials began to accumulate into one of three categories: 1) foundation for EFE, 2) organization of EFE, and 3) implementation of EFE. These categories serve as the core elements of the model, which was ultimately created to depict the structure and content of EFE programs.
The Structure and Content of Early Field Experience Model

The structure and content of early field experience model (Figure 1) represents a framework from which EFE programs can be developed, reorganized, and/or evaluated. The three major components of the model are the foundation, organization, and implementation of EFE. The foundation, which includes the teacher education standards and a conceptual framework, provides the underpinnings from which EFE can evolve. Building upon the foundation is the organization of EFE. In organizing EFE, teacher education programs must address the development of various EFE experiences, the establishment of placement requirements, and the creation of EFE documents for communication purposes. Finally, the implementation component consists of four elements: 1) interaction among the EFE participant, university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and peers; 2) the orientation to the outcomes and learning strategies; 3) the outcomes; and 4) the learning strategies necessary to accomplish the outcomes. The overarching outcome of this model and EFE is the establishment of lifelong learning practices and skills, which can be transferred to clinical experiences and continued throughout an individual’s teaching career (Keheller et al., 1995; NCATE, 2002).
Figure 1. The Structure and Content of Early Field Experience Model
FOUNDATION: Standards and Conceptual Framework

Many within the education profession acknowledge the role EFE plays in the development of preservice teachers (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). Because EFE is a valuable experience, accreditation organizations, professional organizations, state licensure departments, and teacher education programs have incorporated EFE into their accreditation standards, licensure requirements, and curriculums, respectively. The result is recognized standards for EFE and a conceptual framework, which provides the foundation for early field experiences and the premise for the model.

Standards

When the teacher education profession looks for direction in the development and evaluation of EFE, two nationally recognized accrediting agencies provide the framework. Those two organizations are the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC).

NCATE has developed standards that address field experience. Their standard for early field experience states that through EFE teacher education candidates “develop and demonstrate knowledge, skill, and disposition that assist in student learning” (NCATE, 2002). The standard goes on to state that EFE helps initiate the development of competency that continues throughout the teaching career. EFE development requires collaboration, accountability, an appropriate school-based learning environment, and candidate assessment (NCATE, 2002).

TEAC’s goal is to “support the preparation of competent, caring and qualified professional educators” (TEAC, 2002c, paragraph 1). Their goal is accomplished through
what is called *Quality Principles* and *Standards for Capacity*. The principles and standards are the basis for their accreditation process. A process that is based upon each teacher education program’s ability to provide sound evidence, which the program is adequately accomplishing the goals as established by the teacher education program. TEAC’s *Quality Principles* and *Standards of Capacity* loosely refer to EFE. TEAC (2002a) reports that three aspects of their standards align with field experiences. They are 1) *Quality Principle I*: *Evidence of student learning* which includes 1.3 *Caring, teaching skill*; 2) TEAC Capacity Standard 4.3 and specifically 4.3.1, which discusses budgetary and resource allocation; and 3) Teacher Quality Principle II and specifically 2.2 *Evidence of valid assessment*.

Professional organizations provide additional direction for the development of EFE. The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) has developed a set of standards for field experience, which are meant to “correspond with, compliment, and extend the NCATE standards” (Guyton & Byrd, 2000, p.4). The American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) is an example of a subject-specific professional organization that has developed what it calls the *National Standards for Teacher Education in Agriculture*. The document provides the theoretical basis of and vision for teacher preparation in agriculture, as well as its standards, and specifically addresses EFE (AAAE, 2001). The AAAE standards mirror the national standards set forth by NCATE with a focus on agricultural teacher education.

States and institutions also have developed standards, which generally coincide with the national and professional organization standards. Most states have developed standards that are used as the basis for state licensure or certification (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Similarly, institutions have developed standards as part of their conceptual
framework for their teacher education program as required by NCATE. The standards, at all levels, provide the foundation for the entire EFE program.

Conceptual Framework

Once the various standards that impact the development of EFE are identified, the standards serve as the context and foundation from which the institution’s conceptual framework for teacher education is built. The initial step in complying with national standards is the development of a conceptual framework, which establishes a shared vision and provides a direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability (NCATE, 2002; TEAC, 2002c). The conceptual framework provides the following elements:

1. the vision and mission of the institution and unit;
2. the unit’s philosophy, purposes, and goals;
3. knowledge base, including theories, research, the wisdom of practice, and education policies;
4. candidate proficiencies aligned with the expectations in professional, state, and institutional standards;
5. the system by which candidate performance is regularly assessed (NCATE, 2002, p. 12).

Subject-based teacher education programs often provide a broad-based conceptual framework and encourage teacher education programs to develop conceptual frameworks, which serve as a guide and communication tool. For example, National Standards for
Teacher Education in Agriculture call for a conceptual framework for high quality field experiences (AAAE, 2001). Such experiences should be planned and delivered in a diverse school-based agricultural education program where preservice teachers can observe, journal and reflect on the interrelationship of the tripartite approach to agricultural education (i.e. instruction, FFA and SAE).

The basis for the development of a teacher education program is the incorporation of standards and the development of a conceptual framework. These two elements provide the foundation for the development of a comprehensive EFE program. The next step is the organization of the early field experiences.

ORGANIZATION: Experiences, Placement, and Documents

With the foundation for EFE established through the standards and conceptual framework, the organizational phase can be addressed. In the organizational stage, the types of EFE experiences are identified; placement issues are addressed; and EFE documents are prepared.

Experiences

The first issue to address in organizing EFE is the number and type of experiences. McIntyre et al. (1996) recommends that teacher education programs increase the number and variety of EFE sites to dilute the impact of any single experience. However, they admit what occurs during the field experience is more important than the length, and suggest that students must continue to develop professionally through such skill development as analysis and reflection. Similarly, Knowles and Cole (1996) assert that too often field experiences are “too short, too structured, too focused on the immediacy of the classroom action, and too
detached from the personal” (p. 654). The result is the development of teachers who continue to teach as they were taught because their field experiences were superficial, procedural, and merely a rite of passage.

Although it could be argued that a major flaw in teacher education is the disconnect between coursework and field experiences (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Howey and Zimpher (1989) report that exemplary teacher education programs link coursework and field experiences. Carter and Anders (1996) suggest that EFE, offered in conjunction with methods courses, help to more closely integrate the primary goals of the teacher education program. EFE can be embedded in the foundation, methods, or other pedagogical courses with specific connections back to the course and its related content. At other times, it may be more conducive to offer stand-alone experiences, which may meet and fulfill other expectations of the standards and conceptual framework.

A combination of embedded and stand-alone experiences could be offered prior to student teaching as long as each experience has a well defined purpose(s), articulated methods and teaching strategies by which to accomplish the purpose(s), and well outlined roles and interactions of those involved in the experience. Dialogue among the institution’s teacher education program team is required to fully develop early field experiences, which cover the entire preservice experience from the initial exploratory experience through the clinical experiences.
Placement

Placement is a crucial component to teacher preparation (McIntyre, et al., 1996) and the selection of the cooperating teacher is the single most important activity in determining the success of the experience (Vertuno, 1995). The primary pedagogical practices associated with EFE placement has been the use of exemplary sites. This enables preservice teachers to emulate model teachers (Carter & Anders, 1996). In addition, Goodland (1990) urges teacher education programs to move from placing students out of a matter of convenience to one of quality. Preservice teachers should be placed cooperatively with input from both the teacher education program and the cooperating school system (Vertuno, 1995). Appropriately placing students provides an opportunity for the establishment of a partnership and creates a sense of shared ownership (Jaquith, 1995).

Howey and Zimpher (1989) report finding a well-developed field experience component among exemplary teacher education programs. Early clinical field experiences should occur in controlled, natural settings as a means to better prepare preservice teachers for what they will experience as student teachers in the public school system as well as to help eliminate the feelings of anxiety and nervousness (Everhart & Turner, 1996). At a minimum, the site must offer a suitable range of teaching approaches and models (Carter & Anders, 1996). The staff must have a common interest in and a commitment to the preparation of preservice teachers (Carter & Anders, 1996), and be assigned to outstanding teachers who can serve as models (Jaquith, 1995). Also, adequate diversity of students and teachers is important (AAAE, 2001; Carter & Anders, 1996; NCATE, 2002). The importance of placement lies in the fact that preservice students tend to model the teaching
style and methods of the cooperating teacher, even when they contradict the theory and practices addressed in the university classroom (Moore, 2003).

Although most structured field experiences are conducted in public or private school settings, alternative settings, which provide a different context for teaching and learning processes may enhance the professional development of those involved (Carter & Anders, 1996; Knowles & Cole, 1996). Such sites could include various camps and community-based programs, tutoring or remedial centers, child care centers, community workshops and classes, Sunday school classes, 4-H clubs, and babysitting (Carter and Anders, 1996).

Documents

The use of syllabi and/or handbooks may be predicated in part on the types of early field experiences. A syllabus is a guide to the instructor’s thinking and includes an explanation of the purpose, rationale, course content, and procedures. The syllabus serves as a checklist (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Because most student learning occurs outside the classroom, planning for assignments and out of class activities is important (McKeachie, 2002). Although there is no standard model for syllabus development (McKeachie, 2002), several authors provide guidelines (e.g. McKeachie, 2002; Stark & Lattuca, 1997).

A handbook is a broader, more overarching guide that serves as a communication and public relations tool (Slick, 1995). The handbook serves as the means to communicate the guiding principles of the field experiences, describe the purpose and key components of EFE, and articulate the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the experience. As a public relations tool, the handbook communicates the complexity and importance of the teacher
education role in teacher preparation and reflects upon the nature of the institution (Slick, 1995).

In general, a combination of syllabi and handbooks would provide for the most comprehensive communication tool for a successful EFE program. Whether using syllabi, handbook, or a combination thereof, all components of EFE should be addressed in these documents.

IMPLEMENTATION: Interaction, Outcomes, and Active Learning

The previous two components, the foundation and organization, provide the impetus for active learning to occur during EFE, which is also the premise of the entire early field experience. Student development occurs at this stage because of 1) the development of student outcomes and the associated active learning strategies and 2) the establishment of defined roles and positive interaction among the preservice teacher and the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and peers. When EFE is fully implemented, active learning begins to prepare preservice students as lifelong learners for their role as a student teacher and ultimately as a professional teacher.

Interaction

The success and impact of the EFE is completely dependent upon the interaction among those involved in the early field experience, and the interaction between the university and cooperating school. Issues of role definition and expectations are critical to any discussion about the relationships within field experiences (Knowles & Cole, 1996). McIntyre et al. (1996) identified the largest problem with EFE as the lack of communication between the institution and cooperating site, which includes a lack of agreement as to the
responsibility of each participant. Keheller et al. (1995) stated that the expectations between students and teacher educators vary with the student expectations being higher.

McIntyre et al. (1996) identified the need for a common understanding of the roles in a venue where open, direct communication can occur. EFE development requires collaboration, accountability, and an environment where communication between the teacher education program and school can occur (NCATE, 2002). The extent and quality of field experiences is dependent upon the attitudes and practices related to guidance and supervision (Knowles & Cole, 1996). Too often, the focus is only on procedural issues like time management, content coverage concerns, and classroom management (Moore, 2003).

As a result, it is recommended that responsibilities of each party be articulated in writing and shared with those directly involved. Written roles are needed because there seems to be a “lack of agreed-upon and delineated goals, roles and responsibilities… [which] hinder the effectiveness of the triad as a supportive alliance to advance the growth and development” of preservice teachers (McIntyre et al., 1996). In order to fully implement EFE and to make EFE an optimum learning experience, the role and interaction of those actively involved in the development of the preservice teacher must be clearly defined in writing. Furthermore, it is imperative that communication is valued by all parties and continuous throughout the entire experience. Peers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors, each play a critical role in the interaction within EFE.

University Supervisors

University supervisors seem to be the least understood of those involved and generally receive the most criticism (McIntyre et al., 1996). EFE supervision is irregular at
best, especially by campus-based supervisors (Carter & Anders, 1996). With time as a major issue for the university supervisors, the lack of supervision raises the question of how EFE can be adequately evaluated. Their level of influence may vary depending on their degree of involvement and communication, the degree to which the program goals are defined and communicated, and their approach from a broader perspective (Carter & Anders, 1996). There seems to be a natural conflict among the university supervisor, the preservice teacher, and cooperating teacher. This conflict is in part because of the perceived power of the university supervisor, his or her level of self-efficacy as it relates to the field experience program, and the difference in knowledge base related to teaching (McIntyre et al., 1996).

Although complex and sometimes conflicting, Knowles & Cole (1996) identified the various roles and functions of a university supervisor. Those roles included setting goals and expectations for field experiences, orientating students to the field sites, acting as a liaison and reinforcing the university’s perspective, reducing and/or mediating conflict in the field, observing and providing constructive feedback and assessment, and facilitating and supporting student development in a variety of ways even outside of the direct classroom practice. McIntyre et al. (1996) suggested that a positive and collaborative experience is more likely to occur when university supervisors are cooperative, flexible, hard-working, have a sense of humor, and are able to work with others.

Cooperating Teacher

The influences of the cooperating teacher on a preservice student are great (McIntyre et al., 1996). In order for EFE to be successful and beneficial, classroom teachers must be able to shift to the role of teacher educator (Chastko, 1993). The result is that too often
preservice teachers fail to appropriately interact with cooperating teachers. Therefore, the communication is generally brief and impersonal and substantive discussions and conflicts are generally avoided (Killian & McIntyre, 1983). As a means to solve the issue, McIntyre et al. (1996) believed a course on instructional supervision could make a significant difference on the type and appropriateness of feedback given to preservice teachers (McIntyre, et al., 1996). Many times cooperating teachers need training on how to promote an atmosphere built upon communication, reflection, and feedback (Chastko, 1993).

Peers

An often overlooked and undervalued component of EFE is peer interaction. Because students participating in EFE have limited experiences, the challenge is to find ways to understand and make meaning of those experiences (Knowles & Cole, 1996). McIntyre et al. (1996) identified the use of cohort groups as a means to allow students to move through courses and field experiences together. Such interaction provides students the opportunity to explore various meanings and contexts, which provides a communal perspective and breaks down the individualistic barriers associated with teaching. On-campus discussions and individual conferences where students can dialogue with other students, as well as converse with cooperating teachers and university faculty, plays a significant role in the development of beginning teachers (Carter & Anders, 1996).

In summary, close cooperation and communication among all parties involved in EFE (i.e. students, peers, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor) ensures that the appropriate kinds of school environments and supportive supervising practices are provided. These practices foster the optimum levels of personal and professional growth required of a
preservice teacher. Communication enables a more productive working relationship and, most importantly, a more educative experience for the student. By improving communication, preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors will have more opportunities to examine and discuss the rationale behind pedagogical decisions (Moore, 2003). This will allow the EFE relationship to move from one of congeniality to one of cooperation (McIntyre et al. 1996), and ensure that the expected learning outcomes are met.

Orientation of Outcomes and Learning Strategies

Jaquith (1995) expressed the thought that early field experiences could be divided into two types of experiences: early and mid-tier. The early experiences provide the opportunity for career exploration, and the mid-tier experiences provide the opportunity for preservice students to develop teacher-oriented skills. This logic sets the stage for the identification of the two orientations of EFE in this model: exploration and teacher development. The outcomes and related learning strategies are built off of these two orientations of EFE.

Outcomes

EFE provides students with authentic learning, which should take place early and often (NCATE, 2002). An initial outcome of early field experience is career exploration (Jaquith, 1995; Kelleher et al., 1995; McIntyre, 1983). Once students have moved through the exploration phase, additional EFEs expose preservice teachers to the real-world classroom allowing them to begin to develop and transition toward becoming a teacher (Jaquith, 1995; Knowles & Cole, 1996). At this stage the outcomes of EFE include melding
theory into practice (Kelleher et al., 1995; NCATE, 2002; Staffo et al., 2002); applying knowledge (NCATE, 2002; Pierce, 1996); developing teaching skills (NCATE, 2002; Kelleher et al., 1995; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; McIntyre, 1983); and transitioning from student to teacher (NCATE, 2002; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; McIntyre, 1983).

**Learning Strategies**

The learning strategies by which the outcomes of the EFE are fulfilled are paramount (Table 1). The initial learning strategies are used to fulfill the career exploration outcome. Once students determine that they want to continue in the teacher education program, additional early field experiences focusing on those outcomes associated with teacher development may be implemented using the appropriate learning strategies for each of those outcomes. As students work through the various outcomes, additional learning strategies may be implemented to further promote the students’ development toward becoming teachers. By the time students enter clinical field experiences, they should have established the foundational skills necessary for them to continue in the development toward becoming critically, reflective professional educators.
Table 1.

The learning strategies associated with the outcomes of EFE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Career Exploration</td>
<td>• Guided observation (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Journaling (AAAE, 2001, Adler, 1993)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify characteristics of good teaching (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Dialogue (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996, Cruickshank, 1985)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• On-campus seminars (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Skill Development</td>
<td>• Structured assignments like distributing supplies and papers, roll call, grading papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching mini-lessons (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Tutoring (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Development of lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Case studies (McIntyre et al., 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide rationale/ justification for selection of learning outcomes (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop an understanding of student learning (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop an understanding of student motivation (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meld Theory into</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Portfolio development (AAAE, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formal and informal student assessment strategies (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interaction with cooperating teacher and university supervisor (Carter &amp; Anders, 1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher In-service/Professional Development (WIDPI, 2002)</td>
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Table 1. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teacher Development | Transition from Student to Teacher | • Writing about teaching (Carter & Anders, 1996)  
• Critique of teaching, teaching environment, and teaching program  
• Observe teachers practicing reflection  
• Systematic reflection and analysis (National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 1996)  
• Formal and informal self assessment strategies (WIDPI, 2002)  
• Demonstrate understanding of ethical, legal, social, and human issues  
• Develop an understanding of the teacher’s role within the community (Knowles & Cole, 1996) |

**Summary**

The various elements found in each of the three components of the model (i.e. foundation, organization, and implementation) provide the structure upon which an EFE program can be built or evaluated. Early field experiences provide the opportunity for initial exposure and skill development, which if approached properly, will provide the impetus for lifelong learning and the development of a critically reflective professional educator.

The overall development and implementation of EFE is as individual and contextual as teaching itself. Knowles and Cole (1996) argued that field experiences should be considered integrally connected and a symbiotic component of the teacher education program. Keheller et al. (1995) endorsed early field experiences that were well-defined and well-developed, yet maintain enough flexibility to meet the individual differences of the
students. No matter what type of field experiences are developed, preservice teachers will have different experiences because of the variations within the classrooms and cooperating teachers (Chastko, 1993). However, the EFE must be developed conceptually to ensure that the individual development is appropriately focused on meeting the ultimate outcomes of the experience as identified by the standards and conceptual framework. EFE should be approached with similar rigor and emphasis as the clinical experience.

**Conclusion**

An investigation of the literature related to structure and content of the EFE programs provided the basis for this study. The result was a synthesis of material organized into an integrated model for the purpose of incorporating the wide range of knowledge related to EFE, and assembling it in an organized fashion appropriate for making practical educational decisions (Marsh, 1991).

The Structure and Content of EFE Model can be useful to teacher education programs. The model provides the structure for identifying the various elements of a comprehensive EFE program. It also provides a mechanism to enable continuity and consistency among programs. The model provides a framework for the development, reorganization, and evaluation of EFE programs.

The study raises other questions for further research?

1. To what extent does the model represent current EFE programs?
2. Are there other EFE outcomes that have not been identified in the literature, but should be included in the model?
3. Are there other learning strategies that should be included in the model?
4. What types of stand-alone and embedded early field experiences exist in agricultural teacher education?

5. What interaction occurs as part of students’ EFEs in agricultural teacher education?

6. Currently, how are EFE programs evaluated?

References


CHAPTER VI. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

General Discussion and Recommendations

This dissertation contained three papers that described early field experiences (EFE) in agricultural education. Three overall conclusions can be drawn.

The dissertation presents a profile of typical early field experiences in agricultural teacher education. Early field experiences are valued as an important component of teacher education programs. Characteristics of EFE include multiple experiences offered at multiple classifications (grade) levels. Early field experiences are required elements of agricultural teacher education programs with agricultural teacher educators having the primary responsibility for the administration of the EFE program. Programs require a minimum number of contact hours. A minimum number of lessons plans are required to be developed as is a minimum number of lessons taught. Programs have minimum qualifications for cooperating teachers. The profile provides a better understanding of the extent to which EFE is used, and serves as a benchmark for individual institutions to compare themselves to national norms.

A study of EFE syllabi, handbooks, and forms found that the documents did not offer complete details regarding early field experiences. The materials that faculty use to communicate the purposes, objectives, and expected outcomes of EFE provided evidence that there was a lack of integration of theory and practice. EFE programs seem to have more focus on procedural activities with little emphasis on the development and utilization of critical thinking skills. It was discovered that over three-fourths of the agricultural teacher education programs refer to observation as both a purpose and activity for EFE when in fact observation is only an activity by which to accomplish the purposes of EFE. An effort to
develop consistency and improved communication is called for and must be based upon sound research findings and agreed upon principles. A well-developed and well-defined comprehensive EFE program, which has flexibility to meet individual student differences should be the goal of teacher education programs.

The Structure and Content of Early Field Experience Model can be useful to teacher education programs. The model provides a systematic process for developing, reorganizing, and evaluating EFE programs. The primary elements of EFE are presented in the model and consist of the foundation for, organization of, and implementation of EFE programs. The model incorporates a wide range of EFE knowledge, which provides the structure and content for identifying and incorporating the various elements of a comprehensive EFE program.

This study has raised several questions about early field experiences. Questions for further research may include:

1. What impact does a comprehensive EFE program have on preservice teachers?
2. Does EFE impact preservice teachers’ ability to be reflective?
3. Are there other outcomes that have not been identified in the literature, but should be included in the Structure and Content of EFE Model?
4. Are there other learning strategies, which should be included in the Structure and Content of EFE Model?
5. To what extent does EFE impact preservice students’ decision-making processes regarding teaching as a career?
APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM
APPENDIX B. EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE SURVEY
APPENDIX C. CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING FORMS
APPENDIX D. COPYRIGHT PERMISSION
THANK YOU for your time and assistance.

Please return your questionnaire as soon as possible!

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If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu.
Directions: Please read each question below and provide the most accurate answer possible for your university’s early field experience program. When necessary please consult others in your program in order to provide the most accurate information possible. The definition of early field experience appears below.

**Early Field Experience (EFE) is defined as** formal, planned experiences prior to student teaching which place preservice teachers (undergraduate and graduate) in a secondary school setting. These experiences can either be a unit or requirement within a course or a stand alone course. These experiences may be offered within or outside the agricultural education curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Is early field experience (EFE) offered as part of the teacher education program at your university? (Check one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No → If no, skip to question 27.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Is EFE a required component of your university’s agricultural teacher education program? (Check one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How many different EFE opportunities are required of all preservice teachers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___________________________ Number of required EFE opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 31. Please list three individuals who you would consider experts in early field experience in agricultural teacher education. |
|---|---|
| Name | University |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

| 32. As a primary source for further study, we are asking that you provide the EFE handbook(s), bulletin(s), syllabi or other documents used for your required early field experience program. Please identify the method by which you intend to provide a copy of your early field experience materials. (Check one) |
|---|---|
| __ A hard copy will be sent via US Postal Service. A mailing label is provided. |
| __ An electronic copy will be emailed (Send as Word or PDF attachment to msr@iastate.edu) |
| __ The material can be accessed on the web. |
| URL: ___________________________ |
Part V: Demographics

27. List the number of agricultural education (teacher certification) students by grade level enrolled at your university this academic year.

__________ Freshman level agricultural education students

__________ Sophomore level agricultural education students

__________ Junior level agricultural education students

__________ Senior level agricultural education students

__________ Graduate level agricultural education students

28. List the number of agricultural education (teacher certification) students by grade level who will participate or have participated in EFE during this academic year?

__________ Number of freshman participating in EFE

__________ Number of sophomores participating in EFE

__________ Number of juniors participating in EFE

__________ Number of seniors participating in EFE

__________ Number of graduates participating in EFE

29. How many faculty and professional staff members (full-time equivalents) are associated with your agricultural teacher education program?

__________ Faculty Full-Time Equivalents

__________ Professional Staff Full-Time Equivalents

30. How would you best describe your university? (check one)

☐ 1862 Land Grant
☐ 1890 Land Grant
☐ Regional State
☐ Private

4. Are the required early field experience(s) offered as a stand-alone course, stand alone but linked with another course, or a requirement within another course? (Check all that apply)

☐ Stand-alone course

☐ Stand alone course but linked with another course

☐ Requirement within another course → If only imbedded in another course, skip to Question 9.

5. Of the required courses offered as stand-alone courses, how many credits is each experience worth?

__________ Number of Credits

6. Are the credits based on semester, quarter, or other hour types?

_________________________________________ Type of Credit

7. What grading scale is used to report the final grade for the required EFE? (Check all that apply)

☐ Satisfactory/Fail

☐ Pass/Not Pass

☐ Graded (A to F)

☐ Required Credit

☐ No Grade is awarded

8. For which grade level(s) is/are the EFE designed? (Check all that apply)

☐ Freshman

☐ Sophomore

☐ Junior

☐ Senior

☐ Graduate
9. What is the minimum number of hours a student is expected to participate in required early field experiences?

______________ Minimum hours.

10. How many lessons are preservice teachers expected to plan as part of their required EFE?

______________ Number lessons PLANNED

11. How many lessons are preservice teachers expected to teach as part of their required EFE?

______________ Number lessons TAUGHT

12. Are there a minimum number of site visits the preservice teacher must make to the secondary program as part of the required EFE?

☐ Yes → If yes, list the required number of site visits.
☐ No

______________ Number required site visits

25. With which accrediting agency(ies) is your teacher education program affiliated? (Check all that apply)

☐ Our teacher education program is not accredited
☐ Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)
☐ National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
☐ National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)
☐ State Accreditation Agency → Identify below
☐ Other → Identify below

Accrediting Agency(ies):

26. List the core values, beliefs, and/or principles upon which your EFE is based.

Core values, beliefs, and/or principles of EFE:
23. Is EFE required prior to admission to teacher education at your university?

☐ Yes → If yes, list the admission requirement(s).
☐ No

Admission Requirement(s) for EFE:

24. Is EFE required for teacher licensure in your state?

☐ Yes → If yes, list the EFE requirement.
☐ No

State Licensure Requirement for EFE:

14. What type of position (University faculty or staff) is most representative of the individual who has the primary responsibility for the following EFE tasks at your university? Check the appropriate column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFE Task</th>
<th>University faculty</th>
<th>University staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the EFE program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseeing the EFE program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out the EFE Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing students in EFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating EFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Is the person who has the primary responsibility for the following EFE tasks a staff or faculty member in agricultural education? Circle Yes or No. If no, please identify the department that person is in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFE Task</th>
<th>Ag Ed?</th>
<th>If no, list the department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the EFE program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseeing the EFE program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out the EFE Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing students in EFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating EFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. **Is an EFE orientation program offered to the following individuals involved in EFE?** (Please Circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/university staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFE students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. **Is supervision training offered to the following individuals involved in EFE?** (Please Circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. **Is student assessment training offered to the following individuals involved in EFE?** (Please Circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. **Are preservice teachers required to conduct their EFE in a high school/middle school agricultural education program?**

- Yes
- No

20. **What degree of collaboration occurs between the preservice teacher, the EFE cooperating teacher, and the teacher educator during the required early field experience?** (Check one)

- No collaboration
- Very little collaboration
- Some collaboration
- Much collaboration

21. **Are there restrictions on where students can complete their required early field experiences?**

- Yes → If yes, list the restrictions.
- No

Placement Restrictions:

22. **Are there minimum qualifications for teachers to serve as EFE cooperating teachers?**

- Yes → If yes, list the minimum qualifications.
- No

Minimum Qualifications for EFE cooperating teachers:
### Early Field Experiences in Ag Education

#### Document Analysis Code Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.D.:</th>
<th>_____</th>
<th>Name of Institution:</th>
<th>____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Document:</th>
<th>(1) Handbook (2) Syllabus (3) Forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of course:</td>
<td>(1) Stand Alone (2) Embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework:</td>
<td>(1) YES (2) NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered within Ag Ed:</td>
<td>(1) YES (2) NO (3) Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### EXPLAINED PURPOSES

| Purpose Statements: | (1) YES (2) NO |
| Written Objectives | (1) YES (2) NO |
| Explained Purpose:  | (1) Career Exploration (2) Observe (3) Assist |
|                     | (4) Tutor (5) Instruct (6) Conduct Research |

#### MEANS OF ACHIEVING PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

| Part of multiple experiences: | (1) YES (2) NO (3) UNSURE |
| On-Campus Component:          | (1) YES (2) NO (3) Embedded |
| Placement:                    | (1) Restrictions (2) No restrictions (3) Not disclosed |
| Activities:                   | (1) Observe (2) Collection of materials (3) Interview |
|                               | (4) Practice (5) Reflection (6) Evaluation (7) Journal |
| Portfolio required:           | (1) YES (2) NO |
| Relationship between field experience and coursework: | (1) YES (2) NO |

#### INTERACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defined role for:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Educator:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student has interaction with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Educator:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### COMMENTS (Continue on Back)
Early Field Experiences in Ag Education  
Document Analysis Code Sheet  
CODING PROTOCOL  

I.D.: INST # - Doc #  
Name of Institution: 

NOTE: Be as precise as you possibly can. Only mark yes if it is evident from the materials that provide the information. Be careful not make assumptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMOGRAPHICS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Document: What type of document is being analyzed? …handbook, syllabus, forms only? Check all that apply.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of course:</strong> Is the EFE course a stand-alone course or is it part of another course (embedded)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual Framework:</strong> Is there a reference to the teacher education program’s conceptual framework?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offered within Ag Ed:</strong> Is the experience offered within the ag ed department by ag ed faculty?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPLAINED PURPOSES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose Statements:</strong> Is the purpose of the early field experience explained? In some cases this may be the course description.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Objectives</strong></td>
<td>Are written objectives for the EFE provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explained Purpose:</strong> What are the explained purpose(s) of the EFE? Circle all that apply. If other purposes exist, they should be listed in the comments section. Each is defined below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career exploration:</strong> For students to determine if teaching is the career for them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation:</strong> To enter the classroom for the sole purpose of observing the teacher, students and the school environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assist:</strong> Any activities which help the teacher. They may include taking attendance, grading papers, making copies, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutor:</strong> To work with and help students individually or within small groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruct:</strong> To conduct some form of teaching. This may be a single lesson or multiple lessons. The length of the lesson is not a factor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conduct research:</strong> To conduct some sort of applied research within the classroom setting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANS OF ACHIVING PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part of multiple experiences:</strong> Is there more than one course in which EFE is offered? Is more that one set of field experiences required? If this cannot be determined, circle “unsure.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-Campus Component:</strong> Is an on-campus component (required to meet on campus or linked to a class) included in this EFE? If the EFE is embedded in another course (like the foundations course), circle embedded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Field Experiences in Ag Education
Document Analysis Code Sheet

Placement: Does the documents disclose any placement restrictions?

Activities: What activities are used to achieve the objectives of the EFE? If other activities exist, they should be listed in the comments section.

Portfolio required: Is a collection of materials and writings required to be submitted in the form of a portfolio to achieve the purpose of the EFE?

Relationship between field experience and coursework: Is there a clear documented relationship between the field experience and other on-campus coursework? Is this course imbedded within an on-campus course or directly linked to an on-campus course?

INTERACTIONS

Defined role for: Is the role/expectations of each group of individuals defined in the documents?

Student: What is the student expected to do during this experience?

Cooperating teacher: What is the cooperating teacher expected to do during this experience?

Teacher Educator: What is the university supervisor expected to do during this experience?

Student has interaction with: Is the student required to interact with individuals within each group?

Peers: Is there an opportunity for the student to interact with peers during this experience?

Cooperating teacher: Is interaction between the cooperating teacher and the student expected during this experience?

Teacher Educator: Is interaction between the university supervisor and the student expected during this experience?

COMMENTS

This area is to be used to clarify, provide additional data, or make any other notes which may provide insight into the purpose and objectives of the study.
The primary purpose of this dissertation was to describe the nature of early field experience (EFE) in agricultural teacher education programs nationally. The dissertation was divided into three papers. The first paper was a descriptive census study of all active agricultural teacher education programs (N=82). The results of the study provide a general profile of EFE in agricultural teacher education. EFE is a required component of teacher education and offered multiples times. The requirements include completing the experience within agricultural education, a minimum number of contact hours, and minimum number of lessons planned and taught. Placement restrictions and minimum qualifications for cooperating teachers are reported. Many of the similarities among EFE requirements seem to end at broad categorical levels. Most programs report having requirements; however, the means by which each program completes the requirements vary. The second paper described the implementation of EFE. A content analysis of documents (syllabi, handbooks, and forms) from 38 agricultural teacher education programs identified a lack of integration of theory and practice. EFE seemed to focus more on procedural activities and less on the development of critical thinking and reflection. The documents show that few programs define or articulate the intended interaction expected of those involved in the
EFE. The third paper presents the Structure and Content of EFE Model, which consists of three primary components (foundation, organization, and implementation). The foundation for EFE is teacher education standards and conceptual framework. The organization of EFE consists of type of experiences, placement, and creation of EFE documents. The implementation addresses participant interaction, learning outcomes, and learning strategies. The model will be useful to teacher education as a framework for the development, reorganization, and evaluation of EFE programs.