

Self-Career Promotion Behaviors of School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the career promotion behaviors of School-Based Agricultural Education teachers. This study employed survey methodology and included all New Mexico SBAE teachers (N=99). Results indicated teachers were most likely to promote teaching as a career option through student involvement in the curriculum and modeling positive teaching behaviors. It was found that professional commitment, social engagement with students, and prior FFA membership explained 27% of the variance in teachers' decisions to promote teaching as a career. It was recommended that teachers be provided opportunities to learn how to incorporate career promotion activities in their classrooms and programs to encourage students to become SBAE teachers. It was further recommended to engage current teachers with undergraduate agricultural education students to discuss the impact SBAE teachers have on their students' decisions to enter the profession.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The teacher shortage issue plaguing the school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teaching profession is not new (Marx et al., 2017) and was recognized as early as 1921 (Camp, 2000). Contributing to the shortage of teachers, which has resulted in multiple program closures, continues to be increased by retirements of baby-boomer teachers (Thieman et al., 2016) and the variety of career options for agricultural education graduates outside of the teaching profession, among other issues (Lawver & Torres, 2011). Kantrovich (2007) reported the shortage has the potential to further increase if students are not recruited into teacher preparation programs. To address the issue, Thieman et al. (2016) suggested the development of a pipeline of preservice teachers for the profession to ensure an adequate supply of future teachers.

Recruitment efforts to increase the supply of SBAE teachers currently exist and are well documented (Calvin & Pense, 2013; Thieman et al., 2016). Marx et al. (2017) indicated that stakeholders in agriculture consistently report the necessity to recruit secondary agricultural education students and positively portray the profession of teaching. However, recruiting students from the inside is not without challenges. Calvin and Pense (2013) reported the time commitment of teaching, the economy, family responsibilities, and the negative perception of the career field, among other factors, serve as barriers which contribute to the challenge of recruiting future teachers. Nevertheless, researchers have indicated that secondary agriculture teachers positively influence their students' career decisions to pursue teaching (Ball & Torres, 2010; Lawver & Torres, 2012; Park & Rudd, 2005; Wildman & Torres, 2001) and are often credited by their students as role models when selecting agricultural education as a college major and teaching as a career (Hillison et al., 1986; Marx et al., 2014; Park & Rudd, 2005).

The teaching profession emphasizes and thrives on the establishment of long-term, meaningful connections with students, through social engagement, in a way that characterizes the job of teaching (Klassen et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). Researchers have proposed that teacher-student relationships may play the primary role in fostering student engagement and positive student outcomes (Davis, 2003). Furthermore, teacher engagement has been linked to teacher attitudes and motivation levels, which are transmitted to students (Klassen et al., 2013; Roth et al., 2007). As an inherent career promotion technique, Park and Rudd (2005) suggested SBAE teachers should model positive attitudes and behaviors to their students. Furthermore, Thieman et al. (2016) suggested impactful relationships with students can be a catalyst for students to follow in their agriculture teacher's footsteps, suggesting additional investigation into the relationship between job engagement and career promotion behaviors of SBAE teachers is warranted.

The commitment of SBAE teachers to remain in the profession has been linked to the teacher shortage in agricultural education (Kantrovich, 2007). McKim et al. (2017) suggested highly committed teachers promote agriculture program stability. Conversely, Myers et al. (2004) reported teachers who displayed low levels of professional commitment negatively impacted recruitment and retention of students in SBAE programs. While it is clear this variable is vital to the stability of individual agriculture programs, few researchers have explored how the relationship between professional commitment and career promotion behaviors impacts the sustainability of the larger agricultural education profession, suggesting an examination of this phenomena.

The Theory of Planned Behavior served as the foundation for this study as it "provides a useful conceptual framework for dealing with the complexities of human social behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 206). Furthermore, this theory provides a means of understanding individuals' decisions to act and can allow the development of programs to meet student needs (Murphrey et al., 2016). Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) suggested that an individual's behavior is a result of the combination of beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Ajzen (1991) posited intentions precede behavior and presented a model that depicts the influences on intention. Ajzen (2006) explained that individuals act on behavioral decisions based upon *behavioral beliefs* (what one thinks the outcomes of the behavior will be), *normative beliefs* (what other people think about the behavior), and *control beliefs* (what one understands about the factors that facilitate or discourage the behavior).

Purpose/Objectives

It is known that SBAE teachers play a significant role in their students' decisions to pursue teaching as a career option but, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the factors which influence their self-career promotion behaviors to students. Therefore, the central purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding teacher recruitment practices by determining the extent of self-career promotion efforts of SBAE teachers. To accomplish this purpose, the following objectives were used to frame the examination:

1. Describe the self-career promotion behaviors of New Mexico SBAE teachers.
2. Describe the levels of social engagement with students and professional commitment of New Mexico SBAE teachers.

3. Determine if a linear model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in New Mexico SBAE teachers' self-career promotion behaviors, as explained by social engagement with students, professional commitment, and selected demographic variables.

Methods

The population for this study consisted of all SBAE teachers in New Mexico ($N=99$). Teacher contact information was provided by the New Mexico FFA Association. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Human Subjects Committee at Eastern New Mexico. Data was collected using the web-based data collection service Qualtrics® and was guided by suggestions outlined by Dillman et al. (2009), which yielded a final response rate of 69% ($n = 68$). As recommended by Lindner et al. (2001), nonresponse error was controlled by comparing early and late responders and no significant differences were found.

The survey instrument consisted of sections devoted to career promotion behaviors, job engagement, professional commitment, and demographics. To identify how teachers promoted teaching as a career option, the participants were provided a list of choices guided by findings from Arnett-Hartwick (2015) and included student involvement in the curriculum, modeling teaching behavior, general encouragement, discussions during careers units/lessons, and no promotion. Participants were also provided an opportunity to describe their behaviors if the response choices did not accurately describe their behaviors.

The professional commitment construct was developed using the eight-item professional commitment scale (Blau, 1985). Professional commitment items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 7 *Strongly Agree*. Sorenson and McKim (2014) reported reliability of this construct, using Cronbach's alpha, as .84. *Post hoc* analysis of this construct for the current study was established at $\alpha=.85$.

Social engagement with students was measured using the Social Engagement – Students (SES) sub-scale of the larger Engaged Teacher Scale (ETS) (Klassen et al., 2013). This sub-scale reflects particular characteristics of teachers' relationship development with their students. The SES sub-scale is comprised of 4-items in a 7-point Likert-type format with response choices ranging from 1=*Never*, 2=*Rarely*, 3=*On Occasion*, 4=*Sometimes*, 5=*Often*, 6=*Frequently*, 7=*Always*. Klassen et al. (2013) reported reliability of the SES sub-scale at $\alpha=.83$. *Post hoc* analysis of this scale for the current study was established at $\alpha=.83$.

For this study, the average teacher was male ($n=37$, 54.4%) who was 37 years of age and had been teaching for 10.5 years. Fifty-eight (85.3%) of the teachers were former FFA members and 55 (80.8%) reported completing a traditional agricultural education teacher preparation program.

Results/Findings

Objective one sought to identify how [STATE] SBAE teachers promoted teaching as a career to their students. Over half of the teachers promoted teaching as a career by engaging students in the curriculum (29.4%, $n=20$) and by modeling teaching behavior (25.0%, $n=17$). However, 25% ($n=17$) of the teachers indicated they did not actively promote the profession to their students. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

New Mexico SBAE Teachers Agricultural Education Self-Career Promotion Behaviors

Career Promotion Behavior	<i>N</i>	%
Student involvement in the curriculum	20	29.4
Modeling teacher behavior	17	25.0
No promotion	17	25.0
General encouragement for students who show interest	8	11.8
Discussion during careers lessons/units	6	8.8

Describing the teachers' levels of social engagement with students and professional commitment was the focus of objective two. The mean social engagement score showed the teachers often engaged in social behaviors with their students ($M = 5.83$; $SD = 0.91$). Additionally, the teachers were neither overly committed nor uncommitted to the profession ($M = 4.60$; $SD = 1.60$). These findings can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Social Engagement and Professional Commitment Mean scores of New Mexico SBAE Teachers

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Engagement – Students ^a	5.83	0.91
Professional Commitment ^b	4.60	1.60

Note. ^a 7-point scale, 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=On Occasion, 4=Sometimes, 5=Often, 6=Frequently, 7=Always. ^b 7-point scale, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Moderately Disagree, 3=Slightly Disagree, 4=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 5=Slightly Agree, 6=Moderately Agree, 7=Strongly Agree.

Objective three sought to determine if a linear model exists explaining a significant proportion of the variance in New Mexico SBAE teachers' decisions to promote teaching as a career option, as explained by social engagement with students, professional commitment, and selected demographic variables including gender, age, teaching experience, prior FFA membership, and route to teacher certification. In combination, independent variables established a statistically significant model describing career promotion behaviors of New Mexico SBAE teachers ($F=2.72$, $p=.02$) which explained 27% ($R^2=.27$) of the variance in career promotion behaviors. These data can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Factors Explaining the Variance in Career Promotion

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Engagement – Students	-.16	.05	-.41	-3.06	<.01
Professional Commitment	.09	.04	.33	2.51	.02
Prior FFA Membership	.35	.15	.35	2.34	.02
Age	-.02	.01	-.61	-1.69	.10
Experience	.02	.01	.44	1.21	.23
Gender	.05	.10	.07	.51	.61
Certification	.07	.15	.07	.48	.63

Note. $R^2 = .27$, $F = 2.72$, $p = .02$

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

New Mexico SBAE teachers were more likely to promote teaching as a career option to their students by involving them in the curriculum and through modeling teaching behaviors. Engaging students through activities in the agriculture program and by modeling positive teaching behaviors have been found to be positive influences on students' decisions to teach (Lawver & Torres, 2012).

Professional commitment and prior FFA membership were positive predictors of teachers actively promoting SBAE teaching to their students. Since professional commitment has been linked to program sustainability, perhaps teachers view their commitment to the career as more than just their commitment to their job but, to the profession as a whole. Furthermore, as a majority of the teachers were former FFA members, it could be reasonably implied that experiences in the organization may serve as a catalyst for teachers to promote the career.

However, social engagement with students was a statistically significant negative predictor of career promotion. This finding stands in contrast to conclusions from prior researchers (Thieman et al., 2016) who indicated the relationships forged between teachers and students aid in the recruitment of future teachers. But, upon closer analysis, this finding may not be as counterintuitive as it appears. As teachers engage with their students and forge healthy relationships, they become more aware of their students' challenges and desires. With this in mind, perhaps the teachers who are more socially engaged are more understanding and accepting of their students' beliefs and choose to promote the careers for which their students are best suited.

The sustainability of agricultural education depends on an adequate supply of teachers to replace those who leave the profession. If agriculture teachers have a significant influence on the career decisions of their students, it is recommended that secondary teachers are provided the tools and resources to adequately promote teaching. Additionally, teachers need to be made aware that their actions and behaviors have an impact on their students. Engaging panel discussions between current undergraduate agricultural education students and current SBAE teachers may be an opportunity for teachers to witness the positive impacts they have on their students and the future of the profession.

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