

Exploring the Motives for Leaving Teaching among SBAE Temporary Leavers

Tyson J. Sorensen
Utah State University
2300 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-2300
(435) 797-5741
tyson.sorensen@usu.edu

Ashley Cromer
Utah State University
2300 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-2300
(435) 797-5741
ashley.cromer@usu.edu

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Introduction/Need for Research

One of the biggest challenges facing school-based agricultural education (SBAE) today is the lack of qualified agriculture teachers necessary to meet demand (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2014; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Addressing this issue requires efforts in both recruitment and retention. In an effort to establish a sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21st century (Stripling & Ricketts, 2016), this research focused on retention by examining the reasons for leaving among SBAE teachers who left teaching and then later returned. One issue cited in the literature for early SBAE teacher turnover is difficulty balancing work and family roles (Chaney, 2007; Foster, 2001; Kelsey, 2006; Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011; Sorensen & McKim 2014; Sorensen, McKim, & Velez, 2016). In a study exploring teacher turnover among teachers of all disciplines, Stinebrickner (2002) concluded, “A very substantial amount of teacher attrition is directly related to the birth of new children” (p. 208). Despite this, evidence suggests teachers who leave the profession to have a child often return to teaching. Estimates suggest up to one quarter of the teachers hired each year, are temporary leavers, teachers who had once taught before (Wayne, 2000). Because of the dearth of literature in agriculture education regarding temporary leavers, this study sought to describe their characteristics, particularly reasons for leaving.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the human capital theory which can be applied to occupational decision making (Becker, 1994). This theory posits individuals (e.g., teachers) make methodical evaluations of net monetary (e.g., income, promotion opportunity) and non-monetary resources (e.g., stress, satisfaction, work environment, colleague relationships) of current and alternative career options. Based upon those evaluations, individuals make decisions to either leave or remain in their current occupation depending on which options maximize their net returns. As individuals stay and train in a certain profession, capital, like occupational specific training, professional contacts, or tenure is accrued. The more capital an individual has in one type of occupation, the more likely they are to remain. This theory applies also to inter-role conflict in which one potential occupation choice for teachers is the role of parenthood. For many agriculture teachers, particularly females, the choice to leave teaching to raise a family can be a very difficult one to make (Foster, 2001, Murray et al., 2011). The human capital theory can help explain the reasons temporary leavers of SBAE leave teaching for a time.

Methodology

The target population for this study consisted of all secondary agriculture teachers in the United States during the 2014-2015 school year and who self-identified as a participant in the family role. A simple random sample of SBAE teachers from the National FFA Organization ($n = 667$) was obtained. Surveys were distributed electronically to participants, which yielded a usable response rate of 35% ($n = 234$). From those 234, only respondents who had taken an extended leave from teaching were included in this analysis. A total of 22 respondents (9.4%) of the total were included in this study. Early and late-respondents of the total ($n = 234$) responders

were compared in an effort to check for response bias and no significant differences were found among them. As part of a larger study, the instrument was designed to gather descriptive information about participants' personal leave history, including whether they had taken an extended leave from teaching (more than one school term), for how long, and the reasons for leaving. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The reasons for which the participants indicated leaving teaching early were condensed into common themes and reported using descriptive measures.

Findings

Among the respondents, 22 (9.7%) reported taking a leave from teaching for an extended period of time. Of those who reported taking a leave from teaching, 14 (10.3%) were male while 8 (8.8%) were female. The length of time in which respondents reported taking a leave from teaching ranged from one to 24 years. The mean length of time in which respondents reported taking a leave from teaching was 5.5 years ($SD = 7.42$). When comparing the length of time for extended leave by sex, male ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 10.15$) teachers took significantly more time away from teaching than females ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.99$); $t(16) = -2.18$, $p = .045$. Teachers' sex yielded a large (Cohen, 1988) effect size for length of time away from teaching (Cohen's $d = .71$).

Respondents were asked to provide an open response regarding the reason for taking the leave from teaching. The most common responses included caring for children/to be with family ($n = 8$, 36.3%), pursuit or exploration of another career ($n = 7$, 31.8%), and unsatisfied/burned out/needed a break ($n = 3$, 13.6%). Other responses included sabbatical leave, firing, job relocation, and spouse's career. Every respondent who reported leaving for the pursuit of another career ($n = 7$) was male, while every respondent who reported leaving to care for children/be with family were female ($n = 8$). Additionally, every respondent who reported leaving because they were unsatisfied, burned out, or needed a break were male ($n = 3$).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The small proportion (9.4%) of temporary leavers in this study suggests that either few teachers who leave teaching ever return, or not many ever take an extended leave from teaching. More research should be conducted to answer that question. Despite the small sample of temporary leavers, it is important to note that all female temporary leavers left because of family reasons. This finding may explain the difference found in the amount of time away from teaching. Females likely tend to re-enter teaching as soon as children are of the age where arrangements can be made for their care, while males likely return for other reasons (e.g. economic, satisfaction). The fact that females leave primarily for family reasons is consistent with other studies in agricultural education suggesting females struggle with balancing work and family roles, due in part to traditional gender roles in society (Foster, 2001; Kelsey, 2006; Murray et al., 2011). Consistent with the human capital theory, males seem to leave teaching because the monetary benefits appear better (Becker, 1994). Perhaps the reason males returned to teaching is because of the non-monetary benefits (e.g., job satisfaction) associated with SBAE. We recommend qualitative research be conducted with temporary leavers to more fully explore the factors for leaving, returning, and the types of careers pursued after leaving teaching. This research could provide valuable information in addressing teacher turnover.

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