

Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Practices of Washington Agriculture Teachers

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Introduction and Conceptual Framework

The 2016-2020 National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Educators highlights Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs as Priority 5 (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016). Effective agricultural education programs must incorporate all three components of the agricultural education program: classroom/laboratory instruction, FFA, and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, and Ball, 2008). In a synthesis of SAE research Dyer and Osborne (1996) found the agriculture teacher's attitude and past experiences impact an agricultural education program's SAE quality. Research indicates teachers value SAEs but fail to completely implement this component (Dyer & Osborne, 1995; Retallick, 2010).

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in the "teacher responsibilities" related to SAEs. These responsibilities include teaching students about SAEs, helping students plan a SAE program, and supervising SAEs (Phipps et. al, 2008). In order for students to earn FFA degrees and apply for proficiency awards students must keep accurate records of their SAE. Receiving degrees and awards is one avenue of recognition for students and can be used as a motivating factor to participate in SAEs. It has also been suggested that SAE planning involve all stakeholders and should result in the creation of both short-term and long-term goals (Phipps et. al, 2008). In order to understand the status and quality of SAEs in Washington this study sought to describe the teacher practices related to SAEs. Specifically the objectives of this study were:

- 1.) Describe instruction related to SAEs provided by Washington agriculture teachers.
- 2.) Describe SAE planning practices Washington agriculture teachers require of their students.
- 3.) Describe SAE supervision practices of Washington agriculture teachers.
- 4.) Describe SAE record keeping practices of Washington agriculture teachers.
- 5.) Describe ways Washington agriculture teachers encourage students to receive recognition for their SAE.

Methodology

A census survey of all 262 Washington agriculture teachers was attempted. A response rate of 42% was achieved. Qualtrics was used to distribute a researcher developed survey which was reviewed by a panel of experts for face and content validity. The Tailored Design Method was utilized in developing and conducting the survey (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009).

Results/Findings

Results for objective one showed seventy-three of Washington agriculture teachers indicated they do require all students enrolled in their agriculture classes to have a SAE, while 34 do not. In addition, 64 participants indicated a portion of each student's grade is dependent on their participation with a SAE. When the participants were asked what percentage of students enrolled in their agriculture classes had a SAE, the average was 68.39% ($SD = 30.82$). When asked how many hours of instruction was dedicated to teaching students about SAEs each year participants indicated that they provided on average 6.27 hours ($SD = 3.54$) of SAE instruction for introductory level classes, and for non-introductory level classes provided 4.51 hours ($SD = 3.65$) of SAE instruction.

Survey items related to objective two indicated 55 of the agriculture teachers require students to create a written plan for their SAE before beginning their SAE. All 55 said both students and the agriculture teacher have input into creating the plan. In addition, 48 indicated parents had input, three indicated administration had input, and 36 indicated the employer had input if it was a Placement/Internship SAE. Sixty-seven participants indicated they did require short-term goals and said the following people had input in creating those goals: Student = 61, Agriculture Teacher = 65, Parent(s)/Guardian(s) = 52, Administration = 3, Employer (if it was a Placement SAE) = 37, Members of the Advisory Committee = 5, and Other Community Members = 8. Only 19 of the participants indicated they required students to set long-term goals.

For objective three, 92 participants indicated they did supervise SAE projects. When asked how often they supervise SAE projects the highest two responses were “twice a semester” ($f = 22$) and “twice a month” ($f = 18$). The lowest two responses were “once a year” ($f = 2$) and “less than once a year” ($f = 2$). 74% of those who did supervise said they supervise one type of SAE more than others. Entrepreneurship/Ownership and more specifically animal projects were indicated as the type of SAE that requires more supervision.

Results for objective four showed 77 participants require students to keep SAE records. Sixty-four participants provide a record keeping system for students to use, and 41 of those provide an electronic record keeping system. Seventy-three participants indicated they provide an average of 4.11 hours ($SD = 2.55$) of instruction about record keeping. Forty-four participants indicated they provide students with class time to work on their SAE records. When asked how often students were given class time to work on SAE records the following results were given: daily = 1, twice a week = 2, once a week = 3, twice a month = 10, once a month = 17, once every six weeks = 3, once every two months = 5, twice a semester = 9, once a semester = 6, once a year = 1, and only when it time to apply for degrees/awards = 4.

Finally, for objective five, when asked how they encourage students to receive recognition for their SAEs the following results were given: exhibit SAE in local/county fairs = 86, exhibit SAE in regional/state fairs = 39, apply for FFA degrees = 78, apply for FFA Proficiency Awards = 63, apply for local banquet awards = 61, and other = 13. The following were given when asked what other types of recognition were encouraged: community presentations = 2, scholarships = 2, portion of course grade = 1, community service awards = 1, district newspaper = 1, and classroom SAE awards = 1.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

When looking through the lens of the conceptual framework of this study, which proposes “teacher responsibilities” related to SAEs (Phipps et.al, 2009), it appears that some Washington teachers are fulfilling their SAE responsibilities while others are not.. Additional research should explore what resources and professional development will assist agriculture teachers in fulfilling their SAE duties. By assisting teachers to fulfill their SAE responsibilities more students will benefit from the inclusion of all three components of the three-circle model of agricultural education. Programs training preservice agriculture teachers should include instruction in SAE practices and provide resources for future teachers to use with their students. Furthermore, this knowledge could be used to coordinate a national effort to improve the quality of SAE programs in all states, therefore this study should be replicated in other states.

References

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