

**Decision to Enter the Classroom as an Agriculture Teacher:
An Exploratory Qualitative Investigation**

Keith J. Frost

Texas Tech University
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409-2131
(806)834-6526
keith.frost@ttu.edu

Dr. John Rayfield

Texas Tech University
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications
Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409-2131
(806)834-1956
john.rayfield@ttu.edu

Decision to Enter the Classroom as an Agriculture Teacher: An Exploratory Qualitative Investigation

Introduction

A national shortfall of secondary school based agricultural educators has been reported every year since 1965 (Kantrovich, 2007). While programs like the National Teach Ag campaign are working to increase the number of students interested in entering teacher preparation programs, the reality is that not all newly certified teachers are entering the field. Kantrovich (2007) found that only 53% of newly certified agricultural educators entered the profession. When considering students who enter the field of teaching in any subject, Roberts, Greiman, Murphy, Ricketts, and Harlin (2009) noted that only 70% entered the workforce. If one-third to one-half of newly certified agricultural education teachers are not entering the profession, we must critically evaluate programs to ensure an adequate supply of highly qualified new teachers.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the relationship between student teaching, self-efficacy, and the relationship between self-efficacy and career longevity. Student teaching is often viewed as the culminating, capstone experience in the formal education process of training teachers (Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2009). Studies have noted that self-efficacy is at its highest at the conclusion of a student teaching experience (Roberts, Harlin, & Ricketts, 2006). Self-efficacy has been shown to be an important element in developing and retaining teachers with links established between self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008) as well as decisions to remain in the agricultural education profession (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as one's personal perceptions about their ability to plan and carry out certain activities. Bandura further noted that mastery experiences had the strongest influence on developing self-efficacy. McKim and Velez (2017) reported the more time a preservice teacher spent teaching leadership activities, the more self-efficacy those teacher felt in teaching those topics. Vicarious experiences are an opportunity to develop self-efficacy when mastery experiences are not an option (Bandura, 1977). In student teaching, these experiences often include observation of cooperating teachers and have been shown to increase feelings of self-efficacy in student teachers (Stripling, Ricketts, Roberts, & Harlin, 2008). The purpose of this study was to provide personal perspectives on the experiences of students during the final student teaching process at Texas Tech. The research question guiding this study was: does the student teaching experience influence the student's decision to enter the teaching profession?

Methods/Procedures

This study designed using phenomenological methods. Cresswell (2013) describes a phenomenological study as one where the inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced a common phenomenon or lived experience. The target population for this study were completers of the undergraduate teacher preparation program in agricultural education ($N = 15$) at Texas Tech for academic year 2016-2017. Criterion based selection techniques were used to identify potential participants from the following groups based on the graduate's decision to: 1) enter the profession as a secondary agricultural teacher, 2) attend graduate school, or 3) enter another field outside of education. The total number of potential interview participants was six.

One participant chose to opt out of participation. According to Cresswell (2013), the final sample ($n = 5$) is adequate for a phenomenological study. Data were collected in the form of recorded semi-structured interviews and transcribed by an outside source. Potential researcher bias were minimized through bracketing, cross-checks, memoing, and outside triangulation of data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Prior to reviewing the transcripts, pseudonyms were randomly assigned to the participants. Initial analysis of the data was conducted using an open read and re-read process. A subsequent series of readings were performed for open coding purposes and establishing potential themes. Following external triangulation, a final reading of the transcripts was performed to select quotes to provide richness to the themes.

Results/Findings

The research question that guided this study asked if there were any portions of the student teaching experience associated with self-efficacy development influencing the career decision making process of the student teachers. Based on interviews conducted, the answer was no. For Franklin and Cindy, the decision was made long before student teaching. Franklin said, "I was in high school when I decided I wanted to be an ag teacher. I got into ag and stayed there...I knew." This was echoed by Cindy who said "I love kids and that's what it's all about. I've always just wanted to be a teacher." Similarly, Brett made the decision to go to graduate school in his first year at Texas Tech commenting "nobody in my family has a master's degree and I wanted to do that. I didn't care what it took."

Arlene and Emily were the only two who changed their plans during student teaching. Arlene felt confident in her ability to teach saying, "I was as prepared as I could be. I could have done it well." Despite this confidence, she chose to attend graduate school after input from her father who was concerned for her age and the age differential between her and those who would be her students. Emily explained that she was firm in her intention to teach until one month before graduation. Like Arlene, the influence to make the change came from an outside source. She said, "I was asked to come in and learn a very successful business with the opportunity to run it. The money and the opportunity were good, so I took it and ran with it". Although she decided to enter another field, Emily had a very positive take on her student teaching experience.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

The responses provided from study participants indicated the student teaching experience did not influence the decision to teach. This aligns with the findings of Roberts et al. (2009) who reported that the majority of students in their study did not change their intentions. Three of the five participants interviewed followed through on personal intentions decided well before student teaching. The two students who changed their mind did so as a result of influences outside the student teaching experience. These findings perhaps raise more questions than they answer. When is the decision to enter the teaching profession made? What factors contribute most to this decision? Can teacher education programs influence that decision? Are there programmatic implications for certifying graduates who never intend to enter the teaching profession? All of these questions require further inquiry. This study provides evidence that student teachers who had a positive experience and were efficacious in their role as a student teacher still chose not to teach. Agricultural teacher education programs, in our state and nationally, should begin a dialogue around the extraneous variables that influence student decisions to enter the profession.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Blackburn, J. J., & Robinson, J. S. (2008). Assessing teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction of early career agriculture teachers in Kentucky. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 49(3), 1-11. doi: 10.5032/jae.2008.03001
- Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, C., Borgogni, L., & Steca, P. (2003). Efficacy beliefs as determinants of teachers' job satisfaction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(4), 921-932. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.95.4.821
- Cresswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage
- Edgar, D. W., Roberts, T. G., & Murphy, T. H. (2009). Structured communication: Effects on teaching efficacy of student teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education* 50(1), 33-44 doi: 10.5032/jae.2009.01033
- Kantrovich, A. J. (2007). *A national study of the supply and demand for teachers in agricultural education from 2004-2006*. Morehead, KY: Morehead State University
- McKim, A. J., & Velez, J. J. (2017). Developing self-efficacy: exploring preservice coursework, student teaching, and professional development experiences. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 58(1), 172-185. doi: 10.5032/jae.2017.01172
- Roberts, T. G., Harlin, J. F., & Ricketts, J. C. (2006). A longitudinal examination of teaching efficacy of agricultural science student teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 47(2), 81-92. doi: 10.5032/jae.2006.02081
- Roberts, T. G., Greiman, B. C., Murphy, T. H., Ricketts, J. C., & Harlin, J. F. (2009). Changes in student teachers' intention to teach during student teaching. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 50(4), 134-145. doi: 10.5032/jae.2009.04134
- Stripling, C., Ricketts, J., Roberts, G., & Harlin, J. (2008). Preservice agricultural education teachers' sense of teaching self-efficacy. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 49(4), 120-130. doi: 10.5032/jae.2008.04120
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work* 11(1), 80-96. doi: 10.1177/1473325010368316