



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

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Introduction and Purpose

With nearly half of newly certified agricultural educators choosing not to enter the profession a critical look needs to be taken of our teacher preparation programs. This study provides personal perspectives on the impact of the student teaching experience on the decision to enter the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

- This study is grounded in the relationships between student teaching and self-efficacy and the self-efficacy and career longevity.
- Student teaching is a key experience in the training of agricultural educators (Myers & Dyer, 2004)
- There is a connection between positive experiences and self-efficacy in a given task (Bandura, 1986).
- Self-efficacy is at its highest at the conclusion of student teaching (Roberts, Harlin, & Ricketts, 2006).
- Self-Efficacy is linked to job satisfaction and decisions to remain in agricultural education (Blackburn and Robinson, 2008; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

Methods

- This study was phenomenological in design.
- Criterion based selection techniques were used to find participants who chose to: enter or leave the profession or attend graduate school.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with subjects ($n = 5$) and the recordings transcribed.
- Transcripts were evaluated using a read/re-read process for open coding and theme generation.
- Cross-checks, memoing, and external triangulation was employed to minimize bias.

Findings

“I just love kids and that’s what it’s all about. I have always wanted to be an ag-teacher. Always.”
-Cindy

“I was in high-school when I decided to become an ag-teacher. I got into ag and just stayed there....I just knew.”
- Franklin

Brett Decided to Attend Graduate School Very Early
“Nobody in my family has a master’s degree. I wanted to do that. I didn’t care what it took!”

Three Students Made Their Decisions Well Before Program Completion

Two Students Changed Their Plan– But As A Result of Outside Influences

Arlene felt ready to teach:

“I was prepared as I could be (to be a teacher). I could have done it well.” but decided to attend graduate school at the prompting of her father who was concerned about the age difference between her and her students.

Emily had a very positive take on student teaching but was offered a business opportunity:

“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 in and ran with it.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

- In this sample the student teaching experience did not influence career decision making.
- The decision was made well before program completion or influenced later by an outside source.
- For the researchers this study raised the following questions:
 - When are career decisions made?
 - What factors contribute the most to the career decision making process?
 - How can/do teacher education programs influence the decision?
 - Are there implications for certifying teachers that have no intentions of entering the field?

References

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