

**Feel the Churn: Quantifying Teacher Migration in California**

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### Introduction

It is not uncommon to hear an agriculture teacher say, “I am a first year teacher with [x] years of experience.” Within SBAE, migrating teachers occupy 33-38% of program vacancies (Foster, Smith, & Lawver; 2015 & Klapoetke & Buttles, 2016). The 2015 National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand study identified approximately 38% of vacant SBAE positions as filled by migrating teachers (Foster, Lawver, & Smith, 2016). A similar trend presented in 2016 with 37% of hires within SBAE sourced from teacher migration (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2017). National and statewide SBAE data corroborate that migrating teachers fill approximately 35% (Foster et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Klapoetke & Buttles, 2016) of vacant positions.

The broader education profession has a limited scope of understanding regarding teacher migration. In 2012-2013, the National Teacher Attrition and Mobility Survey identified 8% of public school teachers nationally as “movers” (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). This rate of migration has been stable (7-8%) in the seven surveys administered since 1988-89 (Goldring, et al., 2014). The rate of migration among early career teachers (fewer than five years of experience) has been higher than the national average. Nationally and across disciplines 16% and 10% of first through fifth year teachers changed schools in 2008-2009 and 2011-2012, respectively (Gary, Taie, & O’Rear, 2015). This trend continued during the 2012-2013 school year with 13% of first through third year teachers changing schools (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014).

With one-third of program vacancies filled by migrating teachers, additional study relative to “mover” experience and successes is a necessity. Unfortunately, the view of teacher migration is largely through the lens of teacher attrition. Research is both necessary and overdue to quantify the experience demographics of migrating teachers and to quantify time spent in individual programs between migrations. To that end, this study undertakes a quantification of teacher migration in California using state data since 1900.

### Theoretical Framework

Engeström (1982, in Illeris, 2009) proposes a third generation of activity theory useful for examining learning in a variety of systems. The central component of third generation activity theory focuses on the “meaningful object constructed by the activity system” (Object 2, Figure 1) (Engeström, 2009, p. 56). This study highlights the first principle of activity theory: the main unit of analysis is the system’s interaction with an object (Engestrom, 2009). This research quantifies the interaction between the migrating teacher (subject) and the program vacancy (object) in years.

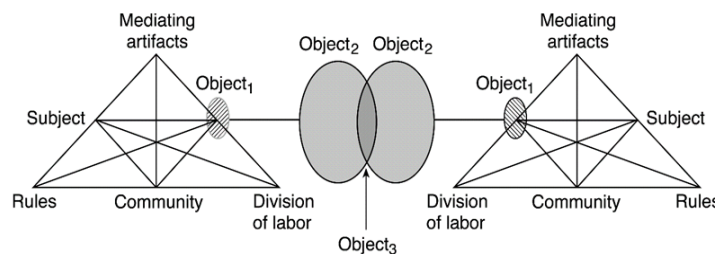


Figure 1: Third generation activity systems (minimal model)

### Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How many years do teachers stay in an SBAE program before migrating?
2. What is the retention rate of SBAE teachers within individual programs?

These questions align with AAAE Research Priority 3, Question 2: “What methods, models, and practices are effective in recruiting agricultural leadership, education, and communication practitioners and supporting their success at all stages of their careers?” (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

### Methodology

This study utilized the California agriculture teacher history from 1900-2018 ( $n = 16,600$ ). It bears noting that total data points include duplicate data as each teachers' year of attrition counted as its own data point. Data were compiled into a composite list of teacher experience by school and program retention by years of experience within a program. Each individual program move counted regardless of the times an individual or program repeated in the data set. This maintained the teacher data as a function of migration and identified the program data in terms of teacher turnover.

### Findings

From 1900-2018 4,519 program migrations occurred (27% of data points) across 616 programs and 1,865 individual teachers. Migrating teachers averaged two years in an individual program. Nearly 60% of migrations occurred within three years of accepting a new position ( $n = 2,665$ ). Of this, 27% of migrations occurred after one year in a program ( $n=1,229$ ), 20% after two years ( $n = 888$ ), and 12% ( $n = 548$ ) after three years. Between 4-14 years in a program, 32% of migrations occur. Less than 8% of program migrations occurred after a teacher had fifteen or more years of experience in a given program. No programs or regions stand out as having substantially higher migration rates. However, over the data frame, programs averaged seven vacancies per school.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This study quantified secondary SBAE teacher migration in terms of the teacher and the program. California data corroborates national trends regarding SBAE teacher migration. This research lends a starting point to quantifying teacher migration at the state level and supports a heightened rate of migration within SBAE relative to other teaching disciplines. This study lends credence to an intensified rate of migration (60%) among teachers with 1-3 years of experience in a given program. It also validates a national trend of approximately one-third (27%) of SBAE program vacancies filled by migrating teachers.

Furthermore, this research yields additional questions. While this quantification provides a starting point, additional efforts are necessary to qualify issues of teacher migration. If teacher retention is to occur with continued success, we must devote additional work to supporting teachers through program migration. Whether we recognize and address it or not, these teachers are indeed feeling the churn.

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