

Let's Connect: Quantifying the Disconnect Between Value Ascribed to The AET and Implementation

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Introduction

Necessarily, secondary school based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers manage several components of the total agriculture program. These include classroom, FFA, and Supervised Agricultural Experiences, and may extend to coordinating alumni and advisory activities (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, and Ball, 2008). Myers, Dyer, and Washburn (2005) identify four of the top five issues facing young agriculture teachers to include components of overall program management. These extend to activities such as alumni chapter organization, advisory committee effectiveness, organizing and planning FFA activities, and recruiting and retaining alumni members (Myers, et al., 2005). Additionally, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) receives lower and lower implementation priority in SBAE programs nationally (Retallick & Martin, 2008; Talbert & Balschweid, 2004; Wilson & Moore, 2007;).

For the six years, the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET) (Hanagriff, Ewell, & Murphy, 2012) has been implemented in secondary SBAE classrooms across the United States. In addition to SAE record keeping, The AET provides components toward program management and justification, including FFA budget, Program of Activities, and award application management, among many other functions. Furthermore, the AET provides resources to aid teachers in implementing the total agriculture program within SBAE classrooms (Hanagriff, et al., 2012). While program management is certainly a broad issue facing SBAE and the AET offers a software solution on a variety of levels, efforts at the state level are necessary toward providing SBAE teachers necessary resources toward effective implementation.

In a recent needs assessment for [State], utilizing The AET identified as one of the top five professional development needs for both induction and non-induction level teachers (Sorenson, Lambert, and McKim, 2014). The current study serves as a progress check on professional development goals previously acknowledged by identifying the value [State] SBAE teachers place on SAE and recordkeeping. This research identifies the percent of students who maintain records, teacher confidence in using The AET, and percent of SBAE instructors implementing The AET as a component of instructional time.

Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes the model of teacher development (Fessler & Christianson, 1992) to examine the disconnect between SBAE teachers' expressed need for professional development relative to the implementation of professional development received. Using a recent needs assessment (Sorenson, et al., 2014) and in conjunction with the current research, this study serves as a barometer toward meeting professional development needs in [State] relative to The AET. This study aligns with AAAE Research Priority 3, Question 6: "What competencies are needed to effectively educate, communicate, and lead?" (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

Methodology

This descriptive study sought to understand [State] agriculture teachers use of SAE recordkeeping and The AET. A survey instrument, adapted from Stewart (2014), was distributed to all [State] agriculture teachers present at the [State] agriculture teachers association fall conference. The survey instrument included questions to identify the value placed on different

aspects of SAE recordkeeping, AET use, and demographic information about the teacher and their program. A panel of experts reviewed the instrument for face and content validity prior to distribution. The response rate was 52%, with 52 participants out of 100 agriculture teachers at the conference completing a survey. Descriptive statistics analyzed the data using SPSS v. 25.

Findings

Participants taught from one to 31 years, with the majority of respondents representing the mid-career population (40%; 6-15 years). Participants identified they were familiar with using The AET, with 67% ($n = 35$) using The AET in class at least once a month. Respondents had a general sense of confidence in using The AET with 40% indicating they felt “pretty good” or others “ask [them] for help.” Thirty-eight percent of participants felt like they knew enough to get by when using The AET. Overall, respondents found value in five different aspects of SAE recordkeeping (see Table 1). Value derived from documenting SAE accomplishments, in-class and out-of-class activities, and FFA accomplishments, as well as award application management and teaching financial record keeping.

Table 1
The Value of SAE Record Keeping

	No Value		Somewhat Valuable		Valuable		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Documenting SAE Accomplishments	0	0.0	3	5.8	47	90.4	50	96.2
Documenting in-class and out-of-class activities	1	1.9	6	11.5	43	82.7	50	96.2
Documenting student FFA accomplishments	0	0.0	2	3.8	50	96.2	50	96.2
As a means to apply for awards and to compare student accomplishments	0	0.0	8	15.4	43	82.7	51	98.1
Teaching sound financial record-keeping practices	0	0.0	10	19.2	41	78.8	51	98.1

Discussion/Implications

The [State] agriculture teachers who participated in the study represented teachers throughout their teaching career. The majority of respondents felt confident in using The AET, used The AET at least once a month, had over 50% of students maintaining records, and found value in SAE recordkeeping. Unfortunately, there continues to be a disconnect in the use of The AET relative to value ascribed to its implementation as one-third of the sample does not use The AET with consistency or confidence.

These findings are not generalizable to agriculture teachers outside of the study; however, they provide insight to begin to understand how agriculture teachers utilize recordkeeping and The AET in their own classroom. Future professional development should build on the value that teachers credit to recordkeeping. Additional research should seek to identify best practices for professional development in recordkeeping, as well as why there is a disconnect between the value ascribed and the implementation of recordkeeping in agriculture classrooms in [State].

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