

**Rekindling the flame: An investigation of teacher passion**

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### **Introduction**

“Passion, rather than merely external rewards or recognition, is seen to be the essential element that sustains and maintains teachers’ interest in the job and their willingness to remain in the profession” (Crosswell & Elliott, 2004, p. 9). International experiences are powerful and have the capacity to refresh teachers of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) (Sandlin, Murphrey, Lindner, & Dooley, 2013). However, there is a barrier in the lack of time and opportunity for international travel, creating an area unexplored in how these experiences influence the passion of teachers of SBAE (Hurst, Roberts, & Harder, 2015). Consistent with the National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE), this qualitative research addressed the change in perception, specifically in SBAE teachers’ level of passion in the classroom, after participating in an agriculture-based educational program abroad (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Guskey’s (2000) model of teacher change framed this study. Guskey (2000) said the final goal of professional development in education is change in teacher beliefs. The creation of specific, targeted professional development helps guide this change (Guskey, 2002). The linear model proposes focus on the contextual experience and the change created in the individual within their environment (Boylan, Coldwell, Maxwell, & Jordan, 2018; Guskey, 2000).

### **Methodology**

In order to evaluate participant perception of an experience, qualitative research methods based on phenomenology were used allowing the participants to provide their own descriptions of their perceived change (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants ( $N = 6$ ) included SBAE teachers who were a part of a professional development event in Ecuador. Researchers developed a series of semi-structured interview questions regarding passion using the Pulse of a Teacher Scale as a guide (Swan, 2005). Interviews were recorded and then transcribed through a transcription service. Triangulation through multiple sources of input, member checks, and peer debriefing established credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Audit trails supported dependability and confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcripts were reviewed using constant comparative analysis, eliciting quotations and thick description to provide transferability while the researchers identified common themes (Lincoln & Guba, 2007; Saldaña, 2016).

### **Results and Findings**

Three themes emerged regarding how the teachers perceived change in their own passion for the profession of teaching SBAE:

#### **Theme 1: Redirection of Engagement**

- “I don’t know if it increased my passion to be an ag teacher, but maybe redirected it. . . I do have an increased passion in the fact that it makes me excited to think that my fellow ag teachers are thinking about this as well.”

- “I’ve used it to kind of reignite my passion. . . when I saw this, I was like that’s really what I want to do, and what I’ve always wanted to do.”
- “I think it just gives me something different to be passionate about.”

#### Theme 2: Student-Centered Approach

- “I feel now more than ever it is so important to connect our kids with other groups and other communities outside of our own. I think that’s the biggest thing I came back with is my kids need to see this.”
- “Especially for my students that are ESL students that come from different backgrounds, it made me want to try and cultivate different ways to be able to really help them and make my class the best experience possible for them.”
- “It’s definitely inspired some of the students to try, not to necessarily go to Ecuador, but just expand their mindset, that there is no one way of doing things.”

#### Theme 3: Reflection

- “I feel like, sometimes, as the classroom teacher, we get so caught up in teaching . . . content. . . you forget the connection that ag has directly to the subject your teaching.”
- “I came back thinking how am I going to get my students to see themselves as global agriculturalists. . . it made me think, how can I inspire them to get into soil and land judging, because those are universal things that they need everywhere. . . and then how can I get my students to possibly experience someone else out of their circle?”

### **Conclusions**

A specific increase in passion was not reported by participants during this event, but rather a redirection of their passion and engagement. Participants reported their passion was reignited by different forms of excitement and affirmation of their initial draw to teaching SBAE. This redirected passion appeared to reinforce a student-centered classroom, where student perspectives prosper in inclusive and effective learning communities. Experiences from this professional development event also aided in the participants ability to reflect, prompting connections between SBAE content and their purpose and passion for joining the profession. With this change in passion, reflection occurred as a means of brainstorming ways to expand student mindsets and broaden perspectives of both SBAE educators and students.

### **Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession**

A strong connection is present between teacher passion and teacher commitment to the profession (Crosswell & Elliott, 2004). This international experience not only reinvigorated teacher passion but redirected those interests towards SBAE content and instruction. These findings allude professional development experiences may serve as a catalyst to change in educators’ perception of their passion and commitment to expanding student mindsets (Mart, 2013). These findings lend themselves to further exploration of how specific professional development may be used to reinvigorate passion among teachers of SBAE.

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