

Agricultural Education Teachers' Perceptions on Extension Collaboration

Oakley G. Perry
Graduate Assistant
School of Applied Sciences, Technology and Education
Utah State University 2300 Old Main
Logan, UT 84341
oakley.perry@usu.edu

Dr. Rebecca G. Lawver
Associate Professor
School of Applied Sciences, Technology and Education
Utah State University
2300 Old Main
Logan, UT 84341
rebecca.lawver@usu.edu

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Introduction/Need for Research

Challenges that school-based agricultural education teachers face are similar to the Cooperative Extension system. They include staffing shortages, limited time, and reduced budgets (McKim & Torres, 2011). Through collaboration, both organizations could support one another to enhance the youth programming provided, increase the public's knowledge on agriculture, and share resources with one another. As both organizations continue to face budget constraints and limited support staff, it will become imperative that School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) and Cooperative Extension collaborate on multiple issues.

A few studies have been conducted on Extension's 4-H professionals' perceptions of SBAE, but in our review we found very little examining just SBAE teacher's perceptions of collaboration. Additionally, the studies on Extension focused predominantly on 4-H and Agriculture and Natural Resource agents (McKim & Torres, 2011; Ricketts & Place, 2005). These studies did not include Family and Consumer Science agents and their thoughts on collaborating with agricultural education.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) defined collaboration as, "A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals." Murphrey, Harlin, and Rayfield (2011) concluded that both agricultural extension and education are seen as competitors and colleagues and stated that it is important to consider these elements in the context of improving collaboration. Further, cooperation is the exchange of relevant information and resources to support each other's goals. According to Dutsch's Theory of Cooperation (1949), both cooperation and competition are important in developing cooperative relationships. In order to evaluate the perceptions of collaboration with Extension, we must also examine potential areas of competition. Such areas could include, students, public support, funding, and community resources.

Methodology

The purpose of this descriptive study was to describe school-based agriculture teacher's perceptions of collaboration with Extension. The instrument was adapted from a previous study on collaboration between agriculture teachers and Extension agents (Ricketts & Place, 2005) The objectives of this study were to (1) identify the impact of collaboration with extension, (2) identify the motivation of collaboration with extension, and (3) identify how often collaboration exists between teachers and extension agents.

The target population for this study consisted of school-based agriculture teachers in Utah during the 2018-2019 school year. We obtained a list of teachers from the state FFA Foundation ($N=164$). Surveys were distributed electronically through email to participants. After three reminders, a response rate of 23% ($n = 38$) was obtained.

The first section of the instrument asked teachers to rate questions regarding the impact of collaboration, the second section asked the motivations for collaboration and were rated on a five-point likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The third section asked how frequently teachers collaborated with extension agents (1 = Never; 5 = Always).

Results/Findings

The teachers who participated in this study agreed Agricultural and Natural Resources Agents can help add value to my program ($M = 4.34$; $SD = .82$), collaboration with Extension offers the best opportunities for youth ($M = 4.11$; $SD = .83$) and a congenial relationship is important for successful collaboration ($M = 4.11$; $SD = .86$). The lowest agreed upon items were FFA and 4-H Should not collaborate ($M = 1.53$; $SD = .99$) and Students should not be allowed to participate in both 4-H and FFA ($M = 1.58$; $SD = 1.01$)

Teachers motivation to collaborate indicated that enhancing their subject area ($M = 4.08$; $SD = .79$) and improved professional relationships ($M = 4.08$; $SD = .78$) were the strongest motivators. The least motivating factor was a belief that FFA and 4-H are in competition with one another ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 1.26$)

Finally, teachers primarily collaborated with extension during the state or county fair ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 1.23$) and when discussing community needs in agriculture ($M = 2.63$; $SD = 1.33$). However, teachers seldom collaborated with their extension agents on the remaining items.

Conclusions

The results from the study indicate that agriculture teachers in Utah agree that collaboration with extension is positive and can contribute to the success of youth in their programs, yet they do not feel a great sense of competition. However, they seem to only collaborate on large events such as state or county fair.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

It seems that in this state, from the teacher's perspective, the collaboration between teachers and Extension is positive. In order to obtain a broader picture of the collaboration in this state we recommend identifying teachers perceived intention to collaborate. We asked them "Do you?" the next question we need to ask is "Should you?" This may provide a greater picture of where specific collaborative efforts are needed. Further we recommend that additional research be conducted in other states to explore the complex nature of collaboration between agricultural Extension and school-based agriculture education. Research collected from studies like this can aid agricultural education teacher preparation in better preparing future teachers on how to collaborate with their Extension counterparts. It can also help Extension learn to adapt in order to better collaborate with and serve the needs of agricultural education programs in their counties.

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