

Mom, You Da BOMB: A Workshop for Ag Ed Moms to Take Control of Their Boundaries

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Introduction

A practical and poignant means of continuing a professional conversation is the engagement in and delivery of teacher professional development. Recent work within the agricultural education literature spotlights the necessity to attend to the ways secondary school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers confront boundaries (Hasselquist & Graves, 2019; Traini, Claflin, Stewart, & Velez, 2019). Boundaries are physical and emotional means of demarcating responsibilities within interactions (Cloud & Townsend, 2017). As a component of the SBAE teacher retention conversation, Hasselquist and Graves (2019) highlight this need specifically for mid-career teachers. We note a unique association with the mid-career stage (4-9 years) relative to a time women in SBAE may also be becoming mothers. As important as it is for all SBAE teachers to say “no” to interferences with work-life balance, we found this a heightened issue for mothers in agricultural education as they navigated the nuanced balance between teaching and caring for children.

How It Works

We collaborated to develop an innovative 70 minute workshop focusing specifically on the ways mothers in SBAE interact with boundaries. We note this workshop employed no screening process apart from the title and description focusing the conversation toward those experiencing the challenge of balancing motherhood and teaching in SBAE. We drew from the work of Traini et al. (2019), and Cloud and Townsend (2017), as well as our personal experience, to consider the ways SBAE moms’ boundaries are challenged and to provide specific structure for the ways SBAE moms can reclaim their boundaries.

Our workshop began by providing time to generate a list of the work SBAE moms are doing on a daily basis to manage a total program and coordinate their home lives. Ideas shared focused on key routines and planning, but helped the participating moms realize the challenging and good work they are already doing to be parents and professionals. Having identified the work, we noted some of the ways the generated list may be allowing boundaries to be crossed. We moved on to identify signs of ignored and crossed boundaries, specifically times when participants felt *overworked/smothered, disrespected/unappreciated, annoyed/resentful, or guilty/shameful* (Cloud & Townsend, 2017). Working with these instances, we engaged with attendees through a process of defining clear boundaries, implementing strategies to enforce boundaries, setting boundaries through practice examples, and establishing language to reclaim crossed boundaries.

Implications

While 20 SBAE teachers attended the workshop at the 2019 NAAE Convention, the reach has extended far beyond that conference. One of the most exciting implications from this workshop was the establishment of a private Facebook group: BOMBs-NAAE, to bring SBAE moms together around boundary accountability and continuous education. One of the workshop attendees created this group within a week after the workshop. Currently, the group has two

administrators and approximately 200 members. We argue this speaks to the need for this work to continue at the professional level. The group administrators post about once a day, while group members post multiple times weekly. To date, monthly activity includes 183 active members a month, with the top ten active members contributing a combined 77 posts and comments over a one month period. Each week, content reminds group members that setting boundaries is a healthy endeavor and additional strategies, resources, and mentoring are continuously shared through this outlet.

Beyond the continued accountability and learning occurring through the social media platform, the need for this innovative workshop has been expressed in requests from various other professional development outlets. We have accepted invitations to facilitate this workshop in two additional distance education settings including a CASE TeachMeet Unconference, and for the New York Agricultural Education and Outreach “Spring into Agricultural Education Virtual Professional Development Series.” We look forward to continuing our support of SBAE moms in their work to establish and reclaim boundaries toward a prosperous personal and professional life.

Future Plans & Advice

Invitations to facilitate this workshop elsewhere and the response and engagement on the private Facebook group indicate this work is needed and should continue. We plan to remain opportunistic in our facilitation, and look forward to expanding this workshop as an opportunity for SBAE parents more broadly, while still serving our SBAE moms specifically.

An important piece of this facilitation is the relative similarity in experience between the facilitators and the participants (both facilitators are young moms with children under the age of four). We would encourage anyone else looking to implement this type of workshop to be of shared experience with the participants to facilitate open conversations, judgement free dialogue, and reasonable practice based on prior experience. This area of teacher support is also lacking a substantive literature base, particularly as it relates to propelling policy change. Further inquiry is warranted, yet must be pursued with care.

Costs & Resources Needed

To date, the costs of implementing these workshops include conference registrations (NAAE: \$335.00), travel (\$300.00), and lodging (\$180.00/night), supported by our home institution. The resources to implement this workshop, however, have incurred minimal costs. This workshop is easily facilitated with tear sheets or whiteboards, markers, and sticky notes. Future digital engagements sustain little cost on the part of the presenters or facilitators, provided a conferencing application (e.g. Zoom) and internet connectivity. We work to use interactive platforms that do not pass on a cost to the participants (e.g. Padlet and Poll Everywhere) to keep this workshop as accessible as possible.

The continued professional development resulting from this workshop (facilitating a social media group) costs about one hour of time per week, per administrator on the group. Administrative tasks include inviting and admitting new members, curating content, and engaging with member posts, questions, and discussions. Moving forward, we are looking to

incorporate book study groups and other resource driven opportunities that would involve minimal costs for the participating members (\$10.00-\$20.00 per book study).

References

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