

Advocating for Agricultural Education: The Lived Experiences of Secondary Teachers

Introduction

Advocacy has been defined as the ability to work with a range of individuals to bring awareness to complex problems (Berke et al., 2010). As such, the underlying principle of advocacy is a desire to make a difference by improving the behaviors, policies, and practices that exist in society (Ezell, 2001). Through advocacy, agricultural educators can seek to change attitudes, behaviors, the political process, and power imbalances in a variety of contexts (National Association of Agricultural Education [NAAE], 2020). To achieve this, however, requires that educators embrace advocacy as a professional responsibility and become leaders for their profession (LeJeune & Roberts, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Bond's (2011) theory of teacher leadership served as the theoretical framework used to guide this investigation. Teacher leaders can influence change regarding:

- (a) institutional policy and practice,
- (b) public attitudes and behaviors,
- (c) the political process, and
- (d) power imbalances for marginalized groups (Bond, 2016).

Because the issues and problems that affect agricultural education are ever-evolving, teacher leaders must be prepared to adapt and respond to various forces that could negatively impact the profession.

Methodology

- 1 Interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).
- 2 Tracy's (2010) standards for qualitative quality.
- 3 Written narrative responses from 113 participants, including 61 females and 52 males.
- 4 Data were also triangulated using: (a) demographic questionnaires, (b) quantitative instruments using a Likert-type scale, and (c) other supporting documents.
- 5 Saldaña's (2016) analytic strategies were used in two distinct phases of analysis. As a result, four themes emerged.

Findings

From an analysis of the data, four themes emerged that represent secondary agricultural education teachers' lived experiences in regard to advocating for agricultural education:

- 1 agricultural education-based events
- 2 involvement in political meetings and conversations
- 3 advocating to and through students, and
- 4 community-based events.

In the first theme, participants reported specific events connected to agricultural student organizations, such as the FFA. In the second theme, participants explained that their advocacy experiences were often as a result of participating in political meetings and conversations with elected officials. In the final theme, participants mentioned that community awareness events were some of the most memorable experiences regarding the phenomenon of interest.

Conclusions, Implications, and Impact

Through analysis, we concluded that participants' experiences were explained through different sources condensed into the four emergent themes.

We recommend state leaders and teacher educators created various professional development opportunities focused on improving teachers' ability to advocate for agriculture and their profession. Future research should focus on the different ways teachers champion various issues and advocacy. Finally, greater emphasis on helping teachers learn how to effectively tell agricultural education's story is needed.

"show...the importance of the FFA and how it produces well-rounded students"

"to see them experience the legislative process in real life was rewarding for me."

"I promote ag daily in my classes to help students realize the importance of agriculture in our daily lives."

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