

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

An Analysis of Secondary Teachers' Perspectives on Enhancing Advocacy Efforts for Agricultural Education

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Introduction

Individuals who are agriculturally literate are better able to observe and communicate how agriculture affects the economy, environment and natural resources, and society (Frick et al., 1991). One way this can be achieved is by ensuring that agriculture teachers become leaders in their schools and communities. LeJeune and Roberts (2020) called for a greater understanding of how secondary agricultural education can lead beyond their classrooms and advocate for agricultural education.

Findings

Four distinct themes emerged from an analysis regarding the improvements that secondary agricultural education teachers desired to better advocate for agricultural education:

1 Increased political involvement

- In this first theme, participants suggested that more focus should be placed on political involvement
- They suggested that teachers be "more open [to] talk to legislators" and that they "need to be more connected with their elected officials"
- This showed that a connection to and communication with elected officials was an important focal point

2 Need for more training and resources

- Regarding training and resources, participants discussed the need for additional "knowledge" and "training" on advocacy
- Many expressed feeling unprepared to have those critical conversations with elected officials
- One participant (#98) explained: "today's new Ag Teacher is intimidated or does not know how to reach out..."

3 Lack of organization and communication

- Participants felt that there was an overall lack of organization and communication within the agricultural education community
- Some felt that "they (the professional organization) simply want my money and not my opinion"
- They also expressed a desire for a more organized, focused, and proactive professional organization

4 Frustration with fellow teachers

- This final theme focused on participants' frustrations with fellow educators in the agricultural education community
- Feelings such as believing that fellow educators "don't do their job" and that they should "be more positive" were common
- The attitudes appeared to stem from an overall lack of communication between educators

Theoretical Framework

- Grounded in Bond's (2011) Theory of Teacher Leadership
- Teachers use both political and non-political processes to improve quality of life for individuals in a given context
- In this investigation, this theory was used to examine how teacher leadership manifested in secondary agricultural education

Methods & Data Sources

- Framed as an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015)
- Embedded Lincoln and Guba's (1985) standards for rigor
- Primary data source consisted of written narrative responses from 113 participants
- Data was analyzed using Saldaña's (2016) coding strategies
- Three first cycle coding approaches: (1) in vivo, (2) descriptive, and (3) values
- Axial coding was then used to reduce data into categories and identify emergent themes

Conclusions/Impact on the Profession

This investigation was meant to provide greater insight into secondary agricultural education teachers' perspectives on teacher leadership and advocacy.

We conclude that participants desired improvements in the areas related to the four emergent themes.

Ultimately, we recommend that future research explore ways to address these concerns, especially as it concerns how secondary agricultural educators can better communicate the importance of the field to decision-makers at all levels of government