Building Muscle: Identifying Resiliency Needs of Beginning Agriculture Teachers

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Introduction/Need for Research

Agriculture teachers are saddled with much responsibility while answering to a variety of stakeholders (Thieman et al., 2014). These same researchers indicated that teachers with higher levels of resilience have more cognitive and physical energy to manage their responsibilities which, according to Bobek (2002) can lead to enhanced teacher effectiveness, improve job satisfaction, and the flexibility to adjust to changing conditions. Hoopes (2017) identified seven resilience muscles that individuals can utilize to maintain or regain productivity in the midst of challenging circumstances and disruptive change. While some individuals are innately more resilient (Werner & Smith, 2001), researchers have asserted that resilience is not a fixed trait, but can be improved (Hoopes & Kelly, 2004). Since improving resiliency has the potential to positively impact teachers' abilities and careers it is reasonable to suggest that teacher educators who are equipped to assist agriculture teachers in improving their resiliency should do so. Therefore, as improvement in personal resilience hinges on understanding one's levels of resilience, the purpose of this study was to explore beginning agriculture teachers' perceived areas of concern about their resilience from which induction program leaders can provide resilience building programming.

Theoretical Framework

Henderson and Milstein's (2003) theory of resilience, coupled with Hoopes' (2017) concept of resilience muscles guided this study. Hoopes described seven areas (*muscles*) 1) positivity; 2) confidence; 3) priorities; 4) creative; 5) connection; 6) structure; and 7) experimenting that resilient individuals can use to maintain or regain productivity, motivation, commitment, and well-being in changing or challenging situations. Connor (1993) noted that resilient individuals are able to see the opportunity in changing situations, and therefore, tend to be more successful. As it relates to the present study, building resilience through induction programming, Easterly and Myers (2018) noted a link between professional development and resilience.

Methods

Through a collaborative USDA-Higher Education Challenge Grant, agricultural education teacher educators at Eastern New Mexico University and New Mexico State University partnered to establish the Beginning Agriscience Teacher Support (BATS) program for induction year agriculture teachers in New Mexico. One of the key components of the BATS program was to provide instruction to the induction year teachers regarding resiliency and resiliency building strategies. During the initial BATS program workshop, the seven induction year teacher participants were provided instruction regarding the concept of resilience, the characteristics of resilient teachers and the strategies to build resilience. The participants then participated in semi-structured interviews with program leaders regarding resilience muscles.

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed by BATS program leaders. Each transcription was qualitatively coded for resilience key words and then categorized into the

respective resilience muscle. The transcripts were re-examined in order to ensure key words accurately described teacher feedback and matched the appropriate muscle.

Findings

All resilience muscles were identified as areas where the study participants sought improvement. Among the participants, the desired areas for improvement ranged between 1 and 7. Creativity and experimenting ($f = 5$) were the most common muscles the participants desired development while confidence and structure ($f = 2$) were the least common. These findings are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Resilience Muscle Improvement Areas (N=7)

Resilience Muscle	Frequency
Creativity	5
Experimenting	5
Connection	4
Positivity	4
Priorities	3
Confidence	2
Structure	2

Conclusions

Consistent with Werner and Smith (2001), who noted that some individuals are innately more resilient, the participants showed a range of desired areas for improvement. The participants were found to be the most resilient in creating structure out of chaos and confidence in their abilities to navigate challenges. However, the participants had concerns regarding their abilities to manage and accept challenges along with finding creative solutions to solve them. Perhaps the participants identified a support or guidance void that would normally not exist during teacher preparation and student teaching that has created concerns regarding the options to solve problems and meet challenges which warrants further investigation.

Recommendations

Resilient teachers have the ability to manage and overcome the challenges inherent to the profession. However, as no teacher is highly resilient in all areas, it is imperative that they be provided the tools to successfully navigate those situations. To do so, it is recommended that researchers continue to identify effective resiliency-building strategies. Those findings should then be embedded within preservice teacher education programs. These effective strategies can then be included in in-service teacher development programs to ensure more experienced teachers continue to maintain their resilience as they proceed through their careers. Finally, it is recommended that all teachers continually monitor their resilience and employ reflection as a tool to identify their strengths and weaknesses that may be maintained and improved.

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