

Teach Ag Tuesday: Increasing Content Knowledge and Fostering Mentorship

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Mentoring experiences and opportunities to build self-efficacy are needed to address recruitment and retention deficiencies among SBAE teachers (Eck & Edwards, 2019; Lamm et al., 2017; McKim & Velez, 2015). Additionally, DeLay and Washburn (2013) found professional networks can deter teacher turnover as collaboration empowers teachers to stay. The purpose of Teach Ag Tuesday (TAT) was to provide content knowledge to preservice teachers while building their network with in-service teachers. This idea can be further explained through recent research that investigated the influence of teacher connectivity among SBAE teachers (Moser & McKim, 2021; Moser & McKim, 2020). Moser and McKim (2020) explored teacher connectivity on four levels: community connectivity, curricular connectivity, school connectivity, and SBAE teacher connectivity. Their findings uncovered a significant influence on SBAE teachers' career commitment. Although statistical significance in curricular connectivity was not found in Moser and McKim's (2020) study, they contended its influence is foundational for teacher satisfaction and commitment (Clemons & Lindner, 2019; Kauffman et al., 2002; Moser & McKim, 2020). Moser and McKim (2021) further studied the influence of curriculum congruence on teacher retention. They found, "Teachers who are connected to their curriculum, community, school, and other SBAE teachers have a network to rely on for mentorship, solution identification, and comradery" (p. 181). Findings and recommendations by Moser and McKim (2020) provided insightful information to increase recruitment and retention efforts throughout SBAE. Specifically, organizers at Oklahoma State University utilized these studies to guide the conceptual framework for creating an environment where preservice teachers can learn content knowledge and network with in-service SBAE teachers to create mentoring relationships.

TAT sessions were conducted in September, October, and November and included content related to beekeeping, photography, agricultural mechanics, and wildlife management courses and curriculum. Two sessions were offered each month to provide a variety of content and meet the scheduling needs of preservice teachers. In-service teachers taught content as they would to their SBAE students, while also presenting the material in a way that reflected a professional development workshop for fellow SBAE teachers. Preservice teachers were able to observe teaching styles and discuss best practices for supervising and teaching students as an SBAE teacher. In-service teachers were identified by Oklahoma State University graduate students, faculty and staff based on proximity to Oklahoma State University campus as well as previous presentations conducted at the Oklahoma STAR summer professional development event.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted during the monthly TAT's as a part of a larger study seeking to increase preservice teachers' confidence in teaching various agricultural concepts. Concluding each session, preservice teachers were asked to provide qualitative feedback in a Qualtrics questionnaire accessed via a QR code. Responses were collected using three prompts (a) what students enjoyed most about this TAT session, (b) what they gained from this TAT session, and (c) what they wished to see in future TAT sessions. Saldaña (2016) was utilized to code responses and identify patterns. In-vivo coding, pattern coding, and descriptive coding guided the researcher to find meaning through data interpretation (Saldaña, 2016).

Findings

Nine preservice teachers attended the September sessions, which focused on photography and bee keeping. The focus of the October sessions was agricultural mechanics and drew 20 attendees. Finally, 23 preservice teachers attended the November sessions to learn about teaching wildlife management. Of the preservice teachers who attended the series, 6 were undergraduate freshman, 6 were undergraduate sophomores, 21 were undergraduate juniors, 16 were undergraduate seniors, and 3 were graduate students.

Research Question 1 sought to understand what preservice teachers valued about TAT sessions. Results from the three sessions revealed patterns including: new/innovative content, tangible resources, hands-on experiences, relevant information, connections, and teacher energy. Additionally, attendees appreciated the diversity of topics presented during the sessions.

Research Question 2 sought to determine what preservice teachers gained from TAT sessions. Two patterns – curriculum and networking – were overwhelmingly clear in the responses. One student stated they developed “a different perspective of what to teach and to reach out to others around you for help.” Another stated, “I gained knowledge on how to go about getting curriculum even if I don’t know anything about the topic.” Similarly, another student stated they gained “confidence to try different things to teach.”

Research Question 3 sought to determine what preservice teachers hoped to experience in future TATs. Many patterns surfaced such as: more SBAE teachers, livestock, contests, FFA, horticulture, diverse and unique topics, and interactive experiences. Two categories were identified in association with this research question: traditional and non-traditional experiences, and more opportunities to observe and interact with SBAE teachers.

Conclusions/ Discussion/ Implications

Findings associated with this research are limited in scope due to the structure of the experience. We can conclude; however, Teach Ag Tuesday was beneficial for our preservice teachers as they develop confidence in preparing to present agricultural education content. The purpose of this study was to evaluate if TAT was fulfilling its purpose to benefit preservice teachers at Oklahoma State University by developing their network of SBAE teachers and mentors and add to their *teacher toolbox* with curricular and pedagogical resources. Findings suggest TAT has the potential to positively influence preservice SBAE teachers through shared content and networking. Additionally, there is a felt need identified from these findings to continue offering TATs and expose preservice teachers to what in-service teachers are doing in their SBAE programs.

Further research is needed to measure impact, effectiveness and application of the confidence, skills, and content gained by preservice teachers from participating in TAT sessions. These findings have implications for graduate students, faculty, state staff and the state teacher organization regarding recruitment and retention of preservice and in-service teachers in Oklahoma. Future plans include further expansion in content areas and sessions for preservice teachers throughout their preparation program. Additionally, TAT has the potential to provide insight into the value of professional development opportunities within the agricultural education profession.

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