

Activating Teachers and Leaders through Intentional Career Recruitment

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Introduction/need for innovation or idea

The value of agricultural education is ever-growing as the average consumer becomes further removed from the farm. As the agriculture industry evolves, the work of agricultural education must evolve to effectively serve learners and the industry (National Research Council, 1988). Furthermore, recruitment into the field, including career recruitment into school-based agricultural education (SBAE), agricultural literacy, and extension education, is increasingly necessary. This need is regularly exemplified in the National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, which has shown that the demand for school-based agricultural educators has not been met since its inception (Kantrovich, 2007), and career recruitment is regularly cited as a top challenge in extension education (Arnold & Place, 2010). On a local level, in Colorado, 14% of positions were unfilled and only 8% of positions were filled by teachers trained in an SBAE teacher preparation program in 2023 (E. Fickbohm, personal communication, November 27, 2023). As we evaluate the supply and demand challenge in agricultural education, the breadth of agricultural education and its larger demand cannot be ignored.

While the supply and demand challenge is not new or unique to Colorado, our approach to career recruitment has evolved in an effort to empower the activation of high school students in such a way that encompasses the breadth of agricultural education. To do so, Colorado State University (CSU) has developed cATALyst: Activating Teachers and Leaders, which offers a suite of professional learning opportunities that are designed to provide high school-aged participants in 4-H and FFA with the skills and resources necessary to be teachers and leaders in their own communities. By doing so, cATALyst aims to increase participants' self-efficacy toward teaching and leading competencies and positively inform their outcome expectation toward a career in agricultural education, known factors that impact career development based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994). In addition to SCCT, the need for intentional career recruitment that promotes the unique qualities of a career in agricultural education has been recommended as a necessary step in addressing challenges related to supply and demand (Lawver & Torres, 2012). cATALyst is an opportunity to fill a gap by providing a transformative professional learning experience that ignites activation of young teachers and leaders to empower them in such a way that increases known factors in a career recruitment model.

How it Works

The first phase of cATALyst was completed through the development of professional learning opportunities at significant agricultural and youth development events in Colorado. Such events included National Western Stock Show, State FFA Convention, and State 4-H Conference. Each of these professional learning engagements includes a lesson related to teaching and leading competencies relevant to a career in agricultural education and an opportunity to apply those skills during the workshop. Participants are then provided with resources, such as a lesson or

planning document, to take back to their community or organization, which can be used to activate the competencies developed through the professional learning engagement.

For example, at the 2025 National Western Stock Show, CSU's Agricultural Education program hosted a cATALyst professional learning engagement for the 4-H State Officers and Shooting Sports Ambassadors. Participants evaluated how and where they could be teachers and leaders in their communities, identified the qualities of great teachers and leaders, and identified the teaching and leading skills they possess. Finally, they practiced teaching and leading an agricultural lesson designed for elementary-aged youth. Through this engagement, participants were able to identify competencies of agricultural educators, relate those competencies within themselves, and practice the competencies they identified by learning how to teach a lesson in an I teach, we teach, you teach method. Following the engagement, they received a bag with everything they needed for the lesson. The intent of this model is to bolster participants' confidence, provide a lesson that they can easily teach, and encourage them to activate it.

Results to Date

Through the development of professional learning experiences, cATALyst has activated young leaders and empowered them to teach others about agriculture. During the pilot phase, cATALyst engaged with 126 future teachers and leaders, including 18 4-H State Officers and Shooting Sports Ambassadors. In April, they facilitated a leadership conference open to 4-H members across the state and utilized the lesson provided and skills developed through cATALyst to teach younger 4-H members.

Future Plans

Because the initial pilot of this program was a success, CSU's Agricultural Education program will continue to foster professional learning opportunities for young agricultural leaders and teachers and begin to evaluate career intent in agricultural education. Moving forward, cATALyst will have a suite of professional learning workshops in line with agricultural education career competencies. Each workshop will follow the format rooted in SCCT, and participants will leave with a resource that can be used in their communities. Additionally, the impact of these intentional career recruitment efforts will be assessed through an instrument developed during our pilot process.

Costs and Resources Needed

In total so far, four workshops were delivered to 4-H and FFA members across three events. The costs involved workshop materials, which included a notebook, lesson materials, and miscellaneous event materials. The average cost for each professional learning experience is \$125 and includes about 4 hours of preparation by faculty.

References

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