

Motivated to Mentor: Exploring California SBAE Mentor Teachers' Motivation to Serve

Ashlee P. Sullivan, Doctoral Student
Agricultural, Leadership, & Community Education
Virginia Tech
925 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg, VA, 24060
asullivan@vt.edu

Hannah Parker, Assistant Professor
Agricultural Education & Communication
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
1 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
hparke03@calpoly.edu

Erin Gorter, Assistant Professor
Agricultural Education & Communication
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
1 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
ekthomps@calpoly.edu

Kenny Saephan, Doctoral Student
Agricultural Communication, Education, & Leadership
The Ohio State University
2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210
saephan.2@buckeyemail.osu.edu

Nicole Ray, Assistant Professor
Agricultural Education & Communication
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
1 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
nray04@calpoly.edu

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Introduction

The relationship between student teachers (STs) and their mentor teachers is influential in shaping novice educators (Izadinia, 2015). Mentors can boost confidence, ease the transition into teaching, encourage reflection, and provide emotional support (Izadinia, 2015; Napanoy et al., 2021). While research has explored ST motivations (Gorard et al., 2023; See et al., 2022), little is known about why mentors choose to support STs. School-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs prepare candidates to teach diverse middle and high school courses such as animal science, plant science, ag mechanics, and ag business (Torres et al., 2010). Despite the high demands and risk of burnout (Queen et al., 2025), many SBAE teachers choose to mentor STs, raising essential questions about their motivation to serve in this role (Samoei, 2020).

Theoretical Perspective

This study is guided by situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, 2020) and the Factors Influencing Teaching (FIT) model (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Eccles and Wigfield (2002, 2020) conceptualized expectancies as central to individuals' future achievement decisions, shaped by self-perception, task value, and contextual factors. Marx et al. (2017) applied the FIT-Choice model to examine motivations to choose teaching as a career. Focused on career choice, this model offers a foundation for understanding SBAE teachers' decisions to mentor STs. Building on these frameworks, this study applies and proposes the FIM-Choice model to explore how mentorship functions as a motivational factor for SBAE teachers.

Methods

Five California SBAE credentialing institutions were contacted for lists of mentor teachers from the past three years. Three responded, yielding a pool of 94 potential participants. All were invited via email, and six agreed to participate in individual, semi-structured Zoom interviews. Recruitment continued until rich, nuanced descriptions were obtained, and no new themes emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews followed a protocol informed by the FIM-Choice model and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis and constant-comparative methods were utilized to examine participants' shared motivations to mentor (Creswell, 2014).

Findings

Two main themes emerged from the findings: *legacy of stewardship and service*, and *the mentor I aspire to be*. These themes highlight the motivating factors of California SBAE teachers to mentor.

Legacy of Stewardship and Service

Mentoring SBAE STs is grounded in tradition, shaped by personal experiences, professional lineage, and pride in preparing future educators. Lily recalls her own student teaching as a time of excitement, growth, and eagerness to student teach, "I think through having great mentoring, it gave me a sense of knowing, like, that it makes a difference, and you kind of want to give what you were given."

In SBAE, becoming a mentor is often seen as a rite of passage, marked by both pride and responsibility. Tracy reflects on her beliefs regarding passing on her knowledge to others, noting, “That’s what we should be here for. If you have the knowledge, share it. Take it or leave it, but I mean, that’s my whole thing.”

Their reflections emulate the field’s intergenerational ethos, where mentoring honors tradition while demanding the responsibilities of guiding a novice.

The Mentor I Aspire to Be

The ideal mentor is seen as someone with clear character and values. Motivations to mentor often stem from wanting to emulate a role model or prevent negative experiences. Bailey reflected on how mentoring prompts deeper reflection and growth for the mentor. In her words:

Having a student teacher makes me a better teacher in a sense, because I’m watching them and they have these new experiences or ideas, and I’m like, ‘I need to step up my game.’

Bailey’s story captures mentorship as a process of self-becoming, where guiding an ST also prompts the mentor to confront and refine their own professional identity.

Through moments of tension, Charlotte discovered the diverse dimensions of mentorship, realizing that supporting another’s development requires humility and self-awareness. When reflecting on her conversations with an ST, she stated:

I ask, ‘How can I have had this conversation differently so that maybe you didn’t get defensive?’ ... those kinds of things. So I’ve learned a lot as a human going through this, and I’ve built a lot of great relationships.

Mentoring extends beyond the immediate placement; relationships with STs transform into lasting professional bonds that continue to shape both mentor and mentee long after the initial experience.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, we recognize the limitations associated with exploring a specific population of California SBAE teachers who have mentored within the last three years. However, the findings can be applied to other teacher preparation programs to improve mentor teacher selection, student teacher placement, and contribute to the educational profession. The findings of *legacy of stewardship and service*, and *the mentor I aspire to be*, provide a framework for the motivations of California SBAE mentor teachers. The FIM-Choice model guided this study, building upon previous research (Marx et al., 2017), and explored motivation through the values and costs associated with choosing to mentor. In this study, participants emphasized personal utility value and social utility value, while recognizing the demand for qualified mentor teachers.

Since this study is exploratory in nature, future research should delve deeper into the specific motivators of mentors found within this study. Additionally, research should be conducted to examine how teacher preparation programs can effectively identify all qualified teachers through a formal process. Additionally, all stakeholders involved in the placement process are encouraged to identify criteria for the inclusion process for mentorship. As stakeholders review procedures and policies on mentorship placements and expectations, motivations should be considered, and changes and reviews should be made.

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