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Decision to Enter the Classroom as an Agriculture Teacher: An Exploratory Qualitative Investigation

Keith J. Frost[1] and John Rayfield[2]

Abstract

With the continued shortage of teachers in agricultural education, the teacher preparation faculty in agricultural education at Texas Tech University began a series of investigations evaluating the teacher preparation program. These evaluations sought to identify areas for improvement and determine if elements of the student teaching experience were barriers to entering the profession. This phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews of recent teacher certification program completers (n = 5) who made the choice to take teaching jobs in agriculture, attend graduate school, or take jobs outside agricultural education. Results indicate the experiences associated with student teaching and the people involved did not influence intentions to teach. The two students who made changes in their intentions to teach, expressed having positive student-teaching experiences and made their decision based on family and business influences outside the student teaching process.

***Keywords*:** career decision; student teacher; decision to teach; impact of student teaching

Introduction

In 2009, a study was published stating the profession of agricultural education was experiencing a "*de facto"* shortage of educators (Roberts, Greiman, Murphy, Ricketts, & Harlin, 2009). The same words can still be used today. Nationally, there has been a shortfall of secondary school based agricultural educators every year since 1965 (Kantrovich, 2007). Some of the loss is a result of retirements and lateral movements between states, however, the most recent supply and demand study reported over 500 school based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers left the profession before retirement (Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2018).

Stress, burnout, and struggles to balance the needs of work with the needs of a life and family outside of the school environment are some of the causes noted as causes. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) reported that 42% of all teachers leaving the profession, inclusive of all grades and subjects, were doing so from conflicts between work and family expectations. These factors have been the subject of much research in multiple states and regions all recognizing the impact of the challenges posed by being a school based agricultural educator (Sorenson, McKim, & Velez, 2016; Hainline, Ulmer, Ritz, Burris, & Gibson, 2015; Crutchfield, Ritz, & Burris, 2013; Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011).

While programs like the National Teach-Ag campaign are working to increase the number of students interested in entering teacher preparation programs, the reality is not all newly certified teachers are entering the field. Kantrovich (2007) found only 53% of newly certified agricultural educators entered the profession. When considering students who enter the field of teaching in all subjects, Roberts, et al. (2009) noted only 70% entered the workforce. If one-third to one-half of newly certified agricultural education teachers are not entering the profession, teacher preparation programs need to be willing to make open and critical examinations of their programs and outcomes with an eye

[1] Keith J. Frost is an assistant professor of agricultural education at Texas A&M University – Commerce. keith.frost@tamuc.edu

[2] John Rayfield is an associate professor of agricultural education at Texas Tech University. john.rayfield@ttu.edu

towards improvement. This study is part of a larger examination of programmatic process at Texas Tech University and adds to the literature by providing a qualitative perspective on a subject where studies have been primarily quantitative (Frost, Rayfield, Lawver, & Ritz, 2018; Roberts, et. al, 2009).

Pragmatism and experiential learning have been at the heart of agricultural education for the last 100 years since the passage of the Smith-Hughes act, possibly even longer. This focus on practical, experiential learning carries over into preparing new agricultural educators as well. Creating real-world learning situations are fundamental to many teacher preparation programs in the form of student teaching (McLean & Camp, 2000; Myers & Dyer, 2004; Roberts, 2006).

Student teaching is often viewed as the culminating or capstone experience in the formal education process of training teachers (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2009; Smalley, Retallick, & Paulsen, 2015). This practicum experience has been described as the place where students have the opportunity to learn in a high-impact setting based on real-world experiences (Smith & Rayfield, 2017). Much emphasis is placed on trying to provide a student teaching experience that is truly representative and programs, like the one at Texas Tech University, ask student teachers to follow their cooperating teacher(s) in every aspect of their job. Therein lies a potential problem.

The three-element model of agricultural education makes the schedule of the "average" SBAE teacher complicated and taxing. A study of agricultural teachers in the western states reported the average professional worked more than 55 hours in a normal week (Sorenson & McKim, 2014). These results are similar to other regions. A study of Texas SBAE teachers showed an average of 58.5 hours worked per week while teachers in Georgia were reporting a 57-hour work week along with 20+ hours attending to personal or family business (Hainline, et al., 2015; Murray, et al., 2011).

In examining student teacher preparation practices, the quantity of the student teaching placements need to be part of the line of inquiry. Fives, Hamman, and Oliverez (2007) conducted a study of traditional student teachers that included elementary and secondary teachers preparing through a college of education. The study produced a conclusion suggesting the volume of work led to symptoms of burnout and further suggested programs proceed with caution (Fives, Hamman, & Oliverez, 2007). In a recent study, Frost et al. (2018) reported some students were recording over 600 hours in the roles associated with an FFA advisor in addition to the time spent as a classroom teacher or student.

The quality of placement should be of equal concern for teacher preparation programs. Several studies have linked positive student teaching experiences to increases in new-teacher self-efficacy (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012; Knobloch, 2006; Whittington, McConnell, & Knobloch, 2006). By extension, negative experiences are associated with decreased levels of self-efficacy. Low levels of self-efficacy are linked with lower levels of job satisfaction and shorter intentions of career longevity (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; McKim & Velez, 2015).

Purpose/Objectives

This study is part of a larger line of inquiry and program evaluation driven by the links between the student teaching experience with self-efficacy development and between self-efficacy and career longevity. These connections coupled with the fact that newly certified student teachers are choosing not to enter the profession of agricultural education shaped the overarching purpose of this study which is to explore personal perspectives on the experiences of students during the final student teaching process at Texas Tech University and potential impacts on career decision making. Moustakas (1994) suggested the idea of seeking a qualitative perspective on subjects whose prior perspectives have been

quantitative is a driving element for phenomenological studies like this one. Specifically, the research questions shaping this study were:

RQ1: Does the student teaching experience influence the student's decision to enter the teaching profession?

RQ2: What are the elements of the student teaching experiences participants see as areas of strength or areas of areas of improvement?

The term "student teaching experience" is operationally defined as those activities and persons directly associated with student teaching, the cooperating school/staff, peers, and university personnel involved in the teacher preparation program.

Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in expectancy-value theory (EVT). EVT is a psychological series of constructs suggested by motivational psychologists and theorists to describe the impact of motivation on choice and persistence (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Central to key concepts of EVT is Bandura's work on self-efficacy (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Student teaching has been identified as a critical portion of training student teachers (Myers & Dyer, 2004; Kitchel & Torres, 2007) and recognizes student teaching as a key opportunity to develop self-efficacy as a teacher. Studies have noted self-efficacy is at its highest at the conclusion of a student teaching experience (Swan, Wolf, & Cano, 2011; Roberts, Harlin, & Ricketts, 2006; Roberts, Mowen, Edgar, Harlin, & Briers, 2007). Beyond student teaching, self-efficacy has been shown to be an important element in developing and retaining teachers with links established between self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008) as well as decisions to remain in the agricultural education profession (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as one's personal perceptions about their ability to plan and carry out certain activities. Bandura identified the four areas influencing self-efficacy development: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states. Mastery experiences were noted by Bandura as the strongest influence on developing self-efficacy and suggested the level of positive belief in the ability to perform a given task is related to having more positive prior experiences in that task. McKim and Velez (2017) reported the more time a preservice teacher spent teaching leadership activities, there was increased self-efficacy in teaching leadership topics. Vicarious experiences include watching others perform a task and are considered an opportunity to develop self-efficacy when mastery experiences are not an option (Bandura, 1977). In student teaching programs, these experiences often include observation of cooperating teachers and have been shown to increase feelings of self-efficacy in student teachers (Stripling, Ricketts, Roberts, & Harlin, 2008).

Social persuasion is described as the nature of feedback and encouragement provided while engaging in an activity (Bandura, 1986). During student teaching, this feedback could come from peers, teacher educators, or supervisors (McKim & Velez, 2016) but is primarily from the cooperating teacher. The type and style of feedback are influenced by the personalities and the nature of the relationship between the cooperating and student teachers. This relationship was described as an area of importance in the student teaching experience (Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007). Physiological and emotional states are the feelings one experiences before, during, or after completing a task (Bandura, 1986). All four of the sources described by Bandura may occur during an experience like student teaching.

Besides the influence of self-efficacy theory, social cognitive variables play a role in developing an EVT model (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and were explicitly used in the model suggested by Park and Rudd (2005). Bandura, one of the early developers of social cognitive theory, derived

impetus for the theory out of the limitations of behaviorism positing children could learn by observing the actions of others and the benefits or consequences meted out based on those actions (Bandura, 2005). Park and Rudd (2005) suggested Agriscience teachers influence the decision-making process of potential teachers through observations made while still secondary students. The researchers build on this and also suggest social cognitive theory plays a role through the observations made of their peers during the preservice teaching experience.

At its core, expectancy-value theory proposes that choices related to achievement and attainment are a function of two key elements: expectancies and subjective task values (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In simple terms, theorists posit decisions to do (or continue) a given activity or task will be heavily influenced by one's belief of if they can successfully complete the task coupled with the several factors of how important they view the task. For this model, the authors suggest there are two values-based beliefs and one expectancy belief shaping the decision to enter the profession as a teacher. The expectancy belief in the model is related to a student's sense of self-efficacy to enter the complex roles of an agricultural educator. Roberts et al. (2009) published a model that included perceptions of the cooperating teacher as the single value factor. The model presented here includes the same idea but adds to it a more general perception of the profession of agricultural education. Additionally, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) note utility value or "how a task fits into an individual's future plans" (p. 72) is an important factor in the decision-making process. The authors have added a utility value factor to the model in addition to the expectation and intrinsic value elements and the achievement factor (Figure 1).

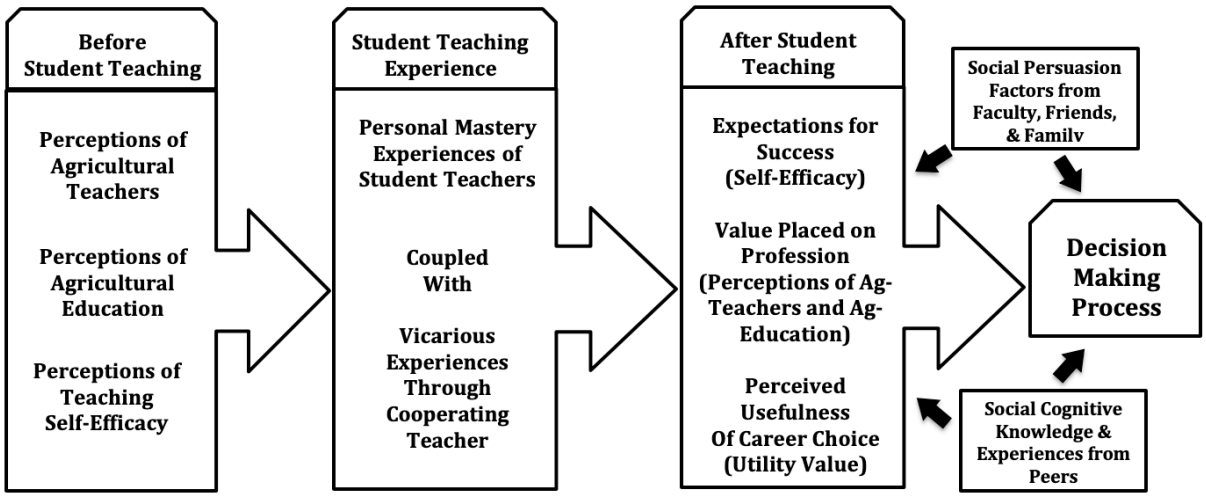

Figure 1. Proposed model of the factors associated with a student teacher's decision to enter the profession of agricultural education.

The decision to teach is conceptualized to include several factors. Prior to the student teaching experience, individuals bring with them perceptions of self-efficacy in their abilities to teach from their own experiences as well as perceptions of agricultural educators (and agricultural education as a perceived whole) from a combination of their own experiences and social-cognitive observations. During the student teaching process, the pre-service teacher has a series of personal mastery experiences in serving in the roles of agricultural educator as well as vicarious experience in observing their cooperating teacher(s). These experiences have an impact on the student perceptions which are now operationalized in the EVT model by the authors thusly: perceptions of self-efficacy and teaching abilities become the student's expectations for success, perceptions of agricultural educators and the profession provide intrinsic value of the profession to the student, and finally, the student's perceived utility value of agricultural education as a career are the achievement variables.

These personal variables are not in isolation. Further influence comes in the form of social-persuasion factors provided by friends, family, cooperating teachers, and faculty members as well as social-cognitive factors from observations made of peers and their individual experiences. The researchers here suggest the decision-making process is a function of a combination of social-cognitive, self-efficacy, and expectancy-values theories.

Methods/Procedures

This study is grounded in phenomenological methods. Creswell (2013) describes a phenomenological study as one where the inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced a common phenomenon or lived experience. In this study, the shared lived experiences are completing the teacher preparation year at Texas Tech University and making a decision on how to proceed professionally.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study were students who completed the undergraduate teacher preparation program in agricultural education (N = 15) at Texas Tech University for academic year 2016-2017. Criterion based selection techniques were used to identify potential participants. These selection techniques involve determining participant groups based on the needs of the study and to assist in quality assurance (Creswell, 2013). Two students were identified from the following groups based on their career decision to:

1) enter the profession as a secondary agricultural teacher,
2) attend graduate school, or
3) enter another field outside of education.

The decision to select two students from each group was deliberate and intentional. From the original 15 student teachers, two decided to go to graduate school, two chose to accept jobs outside the field of agricultural education, and the remaining 11 entered the field as agriscience teachers. The researchers were concerned about creating a bias in the data by overpopulating the sample with students who chose a particular career path and chose to keep the participant group sizes at two per category.

The total number of potential interview participants was (n = 6). Creswell (2013) stated a phenomenon is something experienced and studied in a relatively small group of three to 14 individuals. Creswell cited Polkinghorne in suggesting that interviewing 5-25 individuals is adequate for a phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) suggested essential criterion for participant selection include having "experienced the phenomenon…, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview, grants the interviewer the right to tape-record, and publish the data" (pp. 107). The participants selected met all of these criteria.

Researcher Subjectivity

A subjectivity statement is often used in qualitative research to allow the researchers to share who they are, particularly in relation to the subject and phenomena being researched (Preissle, 2008; Glesne, 1999). There were two researchers involved primarily with this study, both of whom are prior secondary agricultural instructors and FFA advisors from regions different than where the study occurred. The researchers are now involved in teacher preparation and certification programs, one as a tenured faculty member and the other as a doctoral student at the time data collection and initial writing. The worldviews of the researchers would best be described as constructivist whereby we generally believe that understanding the world in which they live is a primary human goal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This worldview is reflected in the choice of theoretical framework and perspective. Moreover,

this notion carries over into this research project where the researchers are using the views of the participants to generate a mutual understanding of the event. (Creswell, 2013).

The researchers recognized potential biases could arise from their combined histories and took steps to minimize them through bracketing methods including memoing to increase the objectivity in the research and analysis process. Bracketing is posited to minimize or mitigate the potential for negative effects of researcher bias or preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Memoing was conducted in the form of observational comments written during the data collection and analysis portions of the study as well as methodological notes throughout the duration of the study.

Another technique that aligns with bracketing is engaging with fellow researchers and outside sources to bring perspective to the data and potential patterns or bias (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Saldana (2013) noted that, particularly in early rounds of analysis where doctoral students may be solo-coding, the idea of casual "shop talk" (p. 206) can be particularly helpful for the researchers to gain insight into what the data may represent. Additional steps were taken to maintain subjectivity in the form of cross-checks, member checks, and triangulation of data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Interview Protocol and Timing

The nature of the study and voluntary participation was explained, and all participants provided consent prior to data collection. Data were collected in the form of recorded semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews increase consistency by providing a protocol for the interviews (Barriball & While, 1994) while allowing for researcher directed flexibility where deemed appropriate (Creswell, 2013). Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (Table 1) about their experiences taking classes on campus during the fall semester, their student teaching experience, perceptions of preparedness at the conclusion of their student teaching, and their career decision making process. An opportunity was given at the end of the interview to allow for open commenting on anything the participant deemed pertinent.

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

Primary Prompt	Probing or Clarifying Prompts
Tell me about your experiences taking classes on the block Fall Semester.	
	How about Spring Semester?
	What was your favorite part or class? Why
	What was your least favorite part or class? Why?
Tell me about your student teaching experience.	
	What were the best parts?
	What sections would you like to change?
After your student teaching experience; how prepared did you feel to be a teacher?	
	What areas did you feel the most prepared in?
	What do you wish would have been included in your year of preparation?

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions Continued…

What are your thoughts about your cooperating teachers?	
	How would you describe the relationship between yourself and your cooperating teacher?
You made the decision to (teach, go to graduate school, not teach) in the first year following certification.	
	When did you make that decision? What led you to make that choice?
What would you like to add or say about the teacher certification program or process? Is there anything you'd like to add or ask on any topic?	

The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy. The audio files were then sent to an outside transcription service. Research notes were taken by the interviewer that included questions, comments, or descriptions of posture, tone, and/or expression. These notes were used later during analysis and reflexive processes. The interviews of the graduate students and classroom teachers were completed before the close of 2017 while attempts were made to coordinate with the other two participants. When it was determined the participation of the final two participants would be through electronic means, the existing audio files were sent to a professional transcription company for creation of verbatim Word documents of the interview. Copies of unique participant transcripts were provided to each participant to verify accuracy and provide credibility to the data.

An electronic option was provided to the two participations who could not schedule a time to meet. A written copy of the study and its voluntary nature was provided along with the research questions in a Microsoft Word format. One of the two participants responded. While a cause of concern for some, the use of interviews where the participants are remote relative to the interviewer are not unheard of in qualitative studies. In a review of qualitative interview methods, Young *et al.* (2018) reported 60% of interviews were conducted face-to-face and approximately 10 and 5% using telephone or internet methods (respectively). The use of technology to conduct interviews was also noted by Oltman (2016) who stated "there are scores of articles based on telephone interviewing (as well as other modes, such as Skype, VoIP…, and email)" (p. 1). The question of trustworthiness, inclusion of the data, and continuation of the project was to be determined by the quality of the responses provided. Kirkevold and Bergland (2007) stated "A fundamental of any qualitative study is data that secures a detailed, in-depth account of the phenomenon under study" (p. 69). The responses provided by our electronic participant were longer than our face-to-face transcripts and, after thorough review by the researchers and a third-party qualitative researcher in the department, deemed valuable and trustworthy to be included in the data pool.

Data Analysis

Prior to reviewing the transcripts, pseudonyms were randomly assigned to the participants and corresponding data. A list of names was sourced from the national weather service for tropical storms and a list of random numbers was used to select the names. This allowed for, not only random names but also to randomize genders to help secure the anonymity of the participants. Any references to the

cooperating teacher for a particular participant were coded as Mr. Mrs. and the first letter of the assigned pseudonym.

Transcripts and digital responses were printed for data analysis and coding. Using hardcopies of data and manually reviewing the data is recommended by Saldana (2013) who further suggests this process is more intimate and gives the researcher more "ownership and control" (p. 26). Initial analysis of the data was conducted using an open read and re-read process to gain a familiarity with the content. A subsequent series of readings were performed for initial theme generation using structural, holistic, and *in vivo* methods. Structural and holistic coding methods are similar in that the codes and notes are made regarding the general content of a passage. The defining difference is that structural codes are written in the form of questions and holistic codes are statements or sentences. Both methods are particularly well suited to semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions (Saldana, 2013). *In vivo* or literal coding gives particular voice to the participants because it is a method of data processing using "the terms used by the participants themselves" (Strauss, 1987, p. 26). Direct quotes were used in the coding and analysis process wherever possible. Subsequent rounds of coding used pattern coding to pull initial raw codes into themes in an effort to generate parsimony (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Investigator triangulation is the process where emergent themes and ideas can be validated by a second, outside observer (Denzin, 1970). Emergent themes and de-identified transcripts were provided to a research associate with training in qualitative methods, but with a different educational, professional, and cultural background. Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggested subjecting ideas to an independent review provides validity to the views and conclusions of the researchers. Following this cross-check, a meeting was held to discuss themes, identify areas of content overlap, and generate a final list of themes salient to this study. A final series of readings of the transcripts was performed where selected quotes were identified to provide support and richness to the themes.

Limitations

Qualitative studies are intended to provide a detailed perspective to a situation and are not intended to be generalized. While steps were taken to minimize error and the influence of the researcher perspectives and present findings that were credible, believable, and dependable (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Denzin 1970; Saldana, 2013), the interpretation and conclusions are limited owing in part, to the perspective of the researcher being the instrument (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Additionally, this study utilized a small sample ($n = 5$) from an equally small population ($N = 15$). The conclusions and findings are not meant to be generalized to the larger population of agricultural educators, pre-service or otherwise. The authors offer this study to add to the body of work and provide a qualitative perspective in the field of teacher preparation. Any interpretation or decisions regarding application, relevance, or transferability to other programs, are left entirely to the reader's interpretation.

Results/Findings

Of the four face-to-face interviews, several traits were observed and noted by the researchers. All of the participants showed a relaxed demeanor and seemed very comfortable with the interviewer and process. Additionally, a sense of pride showed itself in their program completion, decision making, and progress on their new goals. Although not visible, the same sense was noted in the responses provided by the fifth participant who could only participate electronically. In the data analysis, several themes emerged (Table 2). The researchers recognize that one of the themes (theme 6) is a direct result/response of the interview protocol, the remaining five emerged organically.

Table 2

Themes Generated by Data Analysis and Verified Through Triangulation

Theme Number	Theme
1	Real World / Practicality (Enjoyed or Saw Need For)
2	Encouraged (Personal Connection or Lack Of)
3	Prepared / Ready
4	Diversity of Experience (Enjoyed or Felt Limited By)
5	Structure
6	Decision Making (Timing or Process)

Moustakas (1994) suggested that a phenomenological study should "uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative behavior and experience" (p. 105). The impetus for this project was a descriptive (quantitative) study on how student teachers allocated their time during their practicum experiences and a concern that workload, and potential overload, was influencing their decisions to teach. In what may be considered a departure from tradition, the researchers decided to structure the results found around the research questions with reference to the themes and supported by *in vivo* quotes and descriptions.

The primary research question guiding this study asked if there were any portions of the student teaching experience influencing the career decision making process of the student teachers. Based on the multiple interviews conducted and participant responses, the answer was no. Franklin and Cindy made the decision to begin teaching agriculture and commented the decision was made long before student teaching. In his interview, Franklin said, "I was in high school when I decided I wanted to be an ag teacher. I got into ag and stayed there…I knew I wanted to be an ag teacher." This was echoed by Cindy who said "I love kids and that's what it's all about. I've always just wanted to be a teacher." Similarly, Brett made the decision to go to graduate school in his first year at Texas Tech University commenting "nobody in my family has a masters and I wanted to do that. I didn't care what it took."

Of the five interviewed, Arlene and Emily were the only two who changed their plans during their student teaching experience, but neither as a result of the student teaching experience. Arlene felt confident in her ability to teach saying, "I was as prepared as I could be. I could have done it well." Despite this confidence, she chose to attend graduate school after input from her father. Arlene entered the university young and completed her university program in three years. Her father was concerned about her age and the age differential between her and those who would be her students. She resisted the idea of not taking a job teaching immediately and said her response was "No, no, no, I just want to teach. But when they (her parents) offered to pay for it I agreed."

Similar to Arlene, Emily made the decision to not enter teaching during student teaching. She explained her intention was to take a teaching job after graduation and was firm in her path until one month prior to program completion. Like Arlene, the influence to make the change came from an outside source. She said, "I was asked to come in and learn a very successful business with the opportunity to run it. The money and the opportunity were good, so I took it and ran with it." Although she decided to enter another field, Emily had a very positive take on her student teaching experience. About it, she said:

> My student teaching placement was the perfect fit for me. I learned a lot about being an Ag Teacher and learned a lot about what kind of teacher I was. The best part was getting to experience the actual teaching. I know that sounds lame, but it was truly AWESOME. Teaching was a very cool thing to do but [it was] even cooler that I got to see students learn. I loved every second of it. I wish I could have been there whole year.

An element related to the model presented became apparent quickly in the data analysis around the cooperating teacher. Cindy's comments pointed toward vicarious experiences in observing her cooperating teacher's strength in the classroom noting "Mrs. C, the lady I was under, does a lot of great teaching. She was great with projects…great with lecturing and the kids. They loved it." Arlene's comments pointed directly towards social persuasion. Of the interactions with her cooperating teachers, she said "the best part of my student teaching experience was the relationship I formed with the teachers at [school]. They were always open to talk to me and answer questions". Emily also felt supported but spoke more of the nature of the relationship commenting, "I talk with them almost weekly and would consider them some of my closest friends."

The relationships and feedback weren't always positive, but still productive in shaping the experience. Said Franklin, "I don't think we [my cooperating teacher and I] always bonded well because he was very antisocial." He commented to me, "you're too personal with them [the students]…and you're going to end up having kids come into your classroom or office and want to talk to you." Franklin went on to say, with a tone denoting a sure sense of purpose, "that's what teachers are for."

The second research question was presented to determine if the participants would freely offer comments providing insight into areas of strength or opportunities for programmatic improvement. The most prominent theme was an appreciation of, and need for, practical experiences. Two participants made comments on this theme in relation to the "Teaching Methods" class. In her response, Emily said, "Methods pushed me a lot, and for the better. I learned a lot of different techniques and things I could use all over the classroom." Cindy echoed and expanded on the same idea.

> I think teaching methods was probably my favorite class because it gave us variations on different ways to teach. The instructor did a lot of things hands-on: he would do lectures, posters, and group work…then we had to do it on our own. My teaching partner has more experience than I do and asks me all the time about what my different projects are, how I'm doing them, and why. He was never taught this stuff.

Brett and Franklin appreciated the practical applications that came from the laboratory based agricultural mechanics courses. Said Brett, "I'm really glad that I took those [ag-mechanics] courses. I wasn't sure how they would apply to me, but I was so thankful that I could work with my students and engage them in a conversation and the project." Franklin's comment was, "I really liked the 'hands-on' way we learned. I think my students are hands-on learners just like me and it was nice to learn how to teach and learn how to do at the same time."

All participants were asked an open-ended question regarding what they would change in the year of teacher certification classes included in the student teaching year. Once again, the ideas provided centered on practicality. Brett's answer was simple, "I don't know, probably some more practical things." Franklin, Cindy, and Emily's comments provided some more detail. Emily and Cindy both indicated they would like a longer student teaching experience extending into the Fall semester. As a new teacher, Cindy said her biggest struggles were experiences she didn't get in the fall, "There were things I needed to do with our FFA roster, registering for contests, and getting ready for livestock shows that I never got to see. That would be a good thing to add." Emily said, "I think student teaching a full year would be the most appropriate thing to fill in the gaps. Franklin echoed the year-long experience and added some additional, specific suggestions. He said, "I know on our block there was talk about some of our fears. One girl said that she didn't know how to back up a trailer and was worried about out it. I got into teaching and realized that I didn't know how to do ear tags. I could read notches, but never tagged."

The participants commented on frustration with theoretical type topics early as much as the they reported liking, and gaining from, the more practical aspects of the program. Said Cindy of one

class, "we discussed theory and the occasional scenario, but I would have liked to hear things like 'here's how to handle the seniors in your first year or what exactly am I supposed to do when a fight breaks out." Of the same class, Brett commented, "It felt like some of the theory was common sense, I would have liked to dig deeper and get to what you should do." Similarly, but from a different class placing students in non-agricultural classes, the practical application was missing and frustrating. When asked why that particular class was her least favorite, Arlene responded, "I just couldn't find the point of me observing a history class every week."

Discussions/Implications/Recommendations

The first research question asked if there were elements of the pre-service year, including the student teaching process at Texas Tech University influencing the decision to enter the profession as an agricultural educator. The responses provided from study participants indicated the student teaching experience did not influence the decision to teach. This aligns with the findings of Roberts et al. (2009) who reported the majority of students in their study did not change their intentions. Three of the five participants interviewed followed through on personal intentions decided well before student teaching. The two students who changed their mind did so as a result of influences outside the student teaching experiences. One participant (Arlene) decided to go to graduate school as a result of influence from a parent indicating that social persuasion (Figure 1) is a key influence in decision. While Arlene was influenced by social persuasion, Emily changed her decision from impacts of other parts of the model. Utility value is described as a balance between the benefits of the outcome measured against the cost of attainment (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Emily's statements indicated the potential financial benefit of the business opportunity outweighed those of being an SBAE teacher.

A second common theme emerged from the interviews regarding cooperating teachers. All participants made comments focused on their cooperating teacher which described how the relationship and feedback received impacted their experience but not their decisions. This is consistent with Kasperbauer and Roberts (2007) who concluded students saw their relationship with the cooperating teacher as important, but a "bad" relationship did not change their intentions to teach. This ties to the notion of feedback and encouragement (Bandura, 1986) and how those factors play into the decision to teach. Some cooperating teachers will inherently be nurturing in their approach to student teacher mentoring, while others will be more hard-nosed in their approach. Future studies should explore the student teacher/cooperating teacher relationship to determine its impact on the decision to teach secondary agricultural education.

The second research question sought to find programmatic areas of strength and areas of improvement from the viewpoint of the students. In this regard and interesting theme emerged focused on an appreciation for lessons and classes that provided a practical perspective and left students with the sense they could take their new knowledge directly into practice. The implications for those courses or topics where the practicality or application was not perceived are two-fold. The first is that students could be leaving the field with a diminished sense of self-efficacy in a particular area which may lead to insecurities in an area of their craft and increase stress. Additionally, if we put this through the lens of the theoretical framework and expectancy value theory (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), are we creating negative attitudes towards a behavior, practice or the profession? These negative attitudes could inhibit how these students, as teachers, apply what they do know of the topic or skew their view on further development in the field. Further publications or discussions on the practice of incorporating practical aspects of teaching, pedagogy, and classroom management into the more theoretical topics or classes is needed.

These findings perhaps raise more questions than they answer. When is the decision to enter the teaching profession made? What factors contribute most to this decision? Can teacher education programs influence that decision? As an outcome of this study, teacher preparation faculty and graduate students at Texas Tech University have continued this line of inquiry and begun studies statistically comparing specific elements of the student teaching experience with decisions or decision intentions to enter the classroom as an SBAE teacher. As a further, practical outcome of this study, a programmatic review of scope and sequence review has been conducted with changes and additions made to curriculum to enhance practical aspects of classroom and program activities.

We have continued to research self-efficacy as it relates to career/job satisfaction and its ties to teacher attrition. The researchers can't help but as if we are continuing to bark up the wrong tree? This study provides evidence where student teachers who had a positive experience and were efficacious in their role as a student teacher still chose not to teach. Further examination of student teachers at Texas Tech University and other institutions across the region and nation are needed to identify what leads new (or veteran) teachers to their individual decision to enter, or remain in, the profession of agricultural education. Agricultural teacher education programs, in our state and nationally, should begin a dialogue around the extraneous variables potentially influencing a student's decision to enter the SBAE teaching profession. These conversations should spread into other areas of CTE and other agricultural education entities broadly defined (i.e. Extension, Ag Communications, Agricultural Leadership, or International Agriculture). One overarching recommendation for practice is discovering those potential student teachers who are truly focused and intent on becoming teachers and concentrating on recruiting and retaining them as students.

The ongoing shortage of SBAE teachers coupled with continued attrition rates and newly certified teachers not entering the profession is a problem that must be a priority for agricultural education. It is imperative that we, as teacher educators, take a critical look at all areas of our programs and the process to establish greater understanding on the factors that influence potential teachers into, or perhaps out of, the profession. The teacher preparation program at Texas Tech University continues to look critically and its own content and processes and share the results in an effort to stimulate conversation and improvement across the field. We offer this paper as an addition to the body of work.

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