

A Qualitative Analysis of Agriculture Teacher's Attitudinal Changes Toward the Teaching Profession in the First Three Years of Teaching

Abstract

This longitudinal qualitative phenomenological case study seeks to understand beginning agriculture teachers' experiences and how their attitudes toward teaching evolve over time. The research included visits to the teachers' facilities, monthly interviews, reflection exercises, and focus groups. Initial coding included magnitude and in vivo coding methods followed by rounds of focused, axial, and theoretical coding. Based on the individual and collective experiences of the eight teachers gathered monthly over three years, their experiences at the beginning of the year followed a similar path to prior studies. However, following the mid-fall semester "slump" the agriculture teachers in their first, second, and third years had a different experience than prior studies suggested. They experienced a second spring semester "slump" in their attitude toward teaching. While some teachers finished the year strong, others struggled to the end. The teachers described their attitudes toward teaching as more extreme in the monthly interviews but held an overall positive attitude toward teaching when reflecting on the year as a whole at the conclusion of each of the three years. Facilitators of early career teacher support programs should become aware of the highs and lows beginning teachers face and develop programs to help them navigate the challenging times. Recommendations for future research included conducting a similar study with a more diverse population of teachers in a variety of schools and communities.

Keywords: beginning teachers; agriculture teachers; attitude toward teaching

Introduction

"Historically, we treat new teachers the same as we do veteran teachers. That means we give them a key to their room and say, here you go, and good luck" (Moir, 2000, para. 1). Few other professions hold the same expectations of their early career professionals as their seasoned veterans. In teaching, it is not uncommon for a beginning teacher to be expected to carry the same workload as a veteran (Moir, 2000). In some situations, they may even receive a teaching load with more course preparations or a higher percentage of students with increased needs as compared to their veteran peers.

Ellen Moir (1990) proposed the phases of first-year teachers' attitudes toward teaching. This linear representation and carefully described phases of the induction year have informed professional development nationwide for decades. She outlined the highs and lows teachers may experience in the initial teaching year. Administrators, mentors, and teachers can benefit from understanding what the beginning teacher might experience as they work to guide them. Following Moir's work, Rayfield et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study to compare Moir's theory to first-year agriculture teachers' experiences. Rayfield et al. found agriculture teachers had a different experience than outlined by Moir (1990), there were highs and lows in their experiences, but these were found to be less extreme, and the teachers held an overall positive feeling towards teaching.

Fessler and Christensen (1992) also examined the beginning teacher experience in the induction stage of their *Teacher Career Cycle Model*. The model's induction stage focused on the first few years of teaching. This is a time when teachers sought relationships and acceptance. The authors also suggested induction teachers work to balance finding solutions to challenges from their

pre-service experience and with peer mentors. Greiman et al. (2005) looked at the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* (Fessler & Christensen, 1992) among beginning agriculture teachers in their mixed methods study. They found agriculture teachers were not prepared for the socialization challenges and program management of their new positions. The teachers had a “love/hate” relationship with their careers but an overall positive experience.

To support beginning teachers, administrators and mentors need to understand their unique experiences and attitudinal shifts that may occur. Substantial research has been done on the importance of mentors to beginning teachers. Tait (2008) found inadequate mentoring support was a major contributor to teacher attrition. Providing a mentor in the same field with logical times to meet, such as a common planning period, had the strongest positive association with teacher retention (Langley et al., 2014).

Within the agricultural education arena, Tummons et al. (2016) examined the support provided to beginning agriculture teachers by mentors and found the utility of support was not influenced by the amount of interaction time spent with each other, but rather by the quality of the relationship. When Burris et al. (2006) investigated the matching of mentors with beginning teachers, they found that when beginning teachers and mentors had similar partners there was an increased satisfaction in the mentoring experience. Research shows it is not the length of interaction that creates a high-quality mentoring experience, but rather being able to build on similarities and develop a true relationship that established successful mentoring relationships. Lamm et al. (2017) found mentoring relationships that were less formal were more productive when there was a prior relationship between the pair.

However, mentoring is just one component of a comprehensive professional development program for early career teachers. Figland et al. (2019) looked at the professional development needs of Louisiana agriculture teachers and discovered teachers with 1-5 years of experience sought development related to laboratory management and instruction facilities, which was in contrast with teachers possessing greater than six years who desired more experience with instructional technology. Easterly and Myers (2017) found teachers preferred professional development focused on content directly related to the topics they taught. However, professional development that was delivered via active and engaging learning methods was appreciated regardless of the topic. Agriculture is a diverse subject area to teach, and Smalley et al. (2019) looked at specific topics about which agriculture teachers wanted to learn more. Their study found the highest training needs were related to biotechnology, technology, agribusiness, public issues, and agricultural mechanics.

Seeking understanding of the beginning agriculture teacher experience meets the criteria of a “worthy topic” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840) as it is “relevant, timely, significant and interesting” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). As Tracy stated, worthy topics emerge from priorities created out of need and are related to timely societal and personal events. The complexity of the agriculture teacher shortage justifies attention to and understanding of the beginning teacher experiences – specifically, the role that mentoring and early career support programs can play in teacher retention. Recruitment efforts are underway to recruit the next generation into the profession, but a more profound impact can be made by retaining the current teachers in the profession (Watlington et al., 2010). Mentoring and early career support programs exist across the country, but their layout, methods, and resources vary (Burris et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond & Burns, 2017; Lamm et al., 2017; Pfund et al., 2006; Tummons et al., 2016). To best serve early career agricultural education teachers, there is a need to explore their unique needs, successes, and lived experiences so leaders improve orientation, induction, and mentorship programs to increase the retention rates of agriculture teachers. This information can then be used to inform state leaders on how to best support induction and early career teachers.

Purpose and Objectives

As part of a larger investigation, this collective case study was designed to understand beginning agriculture teachers' experiences. The specific components addressed in this article sought to understand how experiences compare to prior research and how beginning agriculture teachers' attitudes toward teaching changed throughout their first three years. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. Do the first-year experiences of the teachers in this collective case study align with meta-analysis by Moir (1990) and empirical research by Rayfield et al. (2014)?
2. How do beginning teachers' attitudes toward teaching change throughout the first three years of their teaching career?

Conceptual Framework

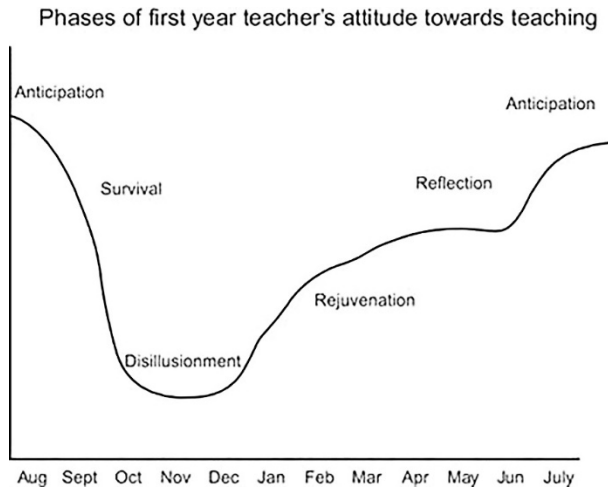
This longitudinal case study was carefully designed and guided by theory to learn the lived experiences of beginning agriculture teachers (Bhattacharya, 2017). The study was guided by instrumental case study design. To fully understand the experiences of the teachers, a longitudinal study was conducted over a three-year time span. A clearly bounded system was established for participants (Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

Fessler and Christensen (1992) authored the *Teacher Career Cycle* (Figure 2.1) that included eight stages teachers move through during their career: preservice, induction, competency building, enthusiastic and growing, career frustration, career stability, career wind-down, and career exit. Most applicable to this study is the induction stage located between pre-service and competency building. Fessler and Christensen (1992) describe the induction stage as one of socialization into the profession, seeking acceptance, and survival. The survival experience is described as the teachers being consumed by the profession and unable to reflect, the teachers then shift to where they can see what they need to change, but they need resources on how. Fessler and Christensen's (1992) model recognized factors that impact the teacher's attitude toward teaching that come from outside the classroom including the personal and organizational environments. While including these outside factors is essential to understanding the beginning teacher experience, this model is limited in scope because of its quantitative nature. Fessler and Christensen (1992) show how teachers' attitudes change, but little about the factors that contribute to the changes.

Moir's (1990) work (Figure 1) was based on journal article reviews of studies that examined a combined total of nearly 1,500 teachers over ten years. Throughout this experience, she reflected on common themes and created the developmental phases beginning teachers may experience. Ellen Moir (1990) explained the first year of teaching as "a roller coaster of events" in her model (See Figure 1), she identified five stages that beginning teachers experience throughout their first year: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and then a return to anticipation. This study has been referenced by numerous Agricultural Education scholars since the mid-1990s (Joerger, 2002; Paulsen et al., 2015; Rayfield, McKim, Lawrence, et al., 2014; Rayfield, McKim, Smith, et al., 2014). Moir's work underscores that beginning teachers' needs are dynamic and complex. Developing a deeper understanding of these needs and the experiences and interactions beginning teachers face calls for a qualitative investigation. Rutherford (2006) authored an article specifically about the "slump" of disillusionment commonly experienced in November as identified in Moir's figure. Rutherford (2006) reinforces the importance of recognition of beginning teachers at this time. Individuals supporting beginning teachers need to understand their natural progression through the stages as this time.

Figure 1

Phases of First-Year Teacher Attitudes Toward Teaching (Moir, 1990)

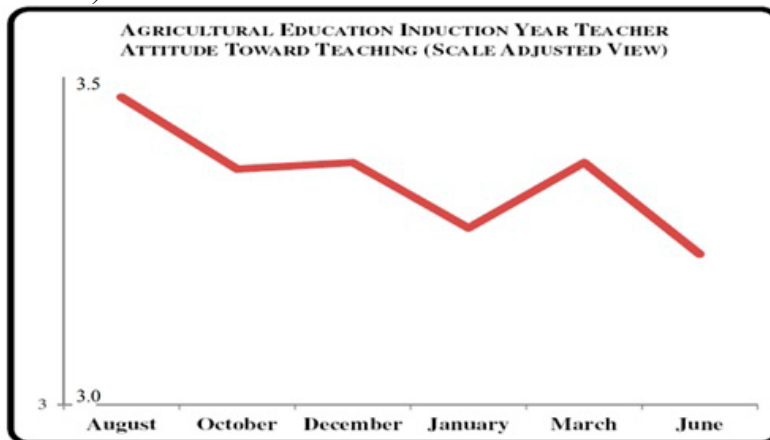


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Rayfield et. al. (2014) analyzed induction year agriculture teachers in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico using quantitative methods. They found only minor changes in teachers’ attitudes toward teaching, lacking the fluctuation Moir (1990) described. The teachers had a generally positive attitude toward their career and their resulting model (Figure 2) suggested different highs and lows than Moir (1990) described.

Figure 2

Scale adjusted model for attitudinal changes in induction-year agriculture teachers (Rayfield, et. al. 2014)



Reprinted from “Analyzing Moir’s curve: a quantitative look at attitudinal changes in induction-year agricultural educators.” By J. Rayfield, B. R. McKim, K. L. Smith, & S. G. Lawrence. *Journal of Agricultural Education*. 55(3), 147-161. Copyright [2014]. Reprinted with permission.

Methods

The findings presented in this article are the result of a larger investigation – an extensive three-year longitudinal qualitative study. The methods sections which would normally appear here are excluded. *These sections are identical to those presented in a companion article also that was drawn from the same study titled “Successes and Challenges Experienced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in their First Three Years: A Collective Case Study” (Disberger et al., 2022).*

In summary, all eight initial participants were graduates in agricultural education in the mid 2010 decade who taught agriculture in Kansas, there were seven females and one male in the first year. In year two, one teacher remained in the profession but left the study leaving seven teachers. In the final year, another participant left the study, and the teaching profession leaving six teachers completing the final year of the study. Data collection included a site visit, monthly semi-structured interviews, focus groups and reflection guides completed annually throughout the three-year study. Initial coding included magnitude and in vivo coding methods followed by rounds of focused, axial, and theoretical coding (Saldana, 2021). Finally, longitudinal coding provided comparison of themes over time (Saldana, 2021). Reflective journaling and an extensive audit trail were utilized throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2018). Through analysis, major themes emerged. The collective case study (Stake, 1995) approach was used to understand the unique experiences of this group of teachers.

Each interview started with an open-ended question to build rapport, “hello, how are things going?” and was followed by the initial question which asked, “describe your feelings about teaching using one word.” This was followed with “what has shaped those feelings?” Unique to this article, additional analysis using magnitude coding was utilized to assign a sentiment value of positive, negative, and neutral (Saldana, 2021) to the one-word term teachers identified to describe their attitude toward teaching each month over the three years. To understand how their attitudes toward teaching changed throughout the year, and how that compared to their annual reflection guide which asked them to reflect on the year as a whole and identify highs and lows of each year. The terms they identified each month were magnitude coded based on the nature of the term and their descriptions of experiences with which they associated the selected word. It is important to note, in some instances, the same term was coded in two different categories and the context of how teachers presented the term was analyzed to determine proper categorization. Each term was coded to reflect a positive, neutral, or negative attitude at that point in time. A summary of the terms the teachers used and how they were coded is presented in Table 1. To create a visual representation of the teacher’s attitudinal changes, numeric values were associated with each term for the purpose of converting text to nominal data for the purpose of visually representing the attitudinal shifts over time, the numeric values are also presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Terms Representing the Teachers Attitude Toward Teaching and Coding Summary

Code	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Numeric Value	3	2	1
Terms	A breeze	Eventful	Annoying
	Accomplished	Adaptable	Awful
	Adjusted	Anticipation	Blur
	Adventurous (Adventure)	Better	Busy
	Amazing	Busy	Challenging
	Awesome	Calm before the storm	Chaos (Chaotic)

	Comical	Challenging/Exciting	Crazy
	Creative	Determined	Exhausting
	Easy	Diverse	Frustrating
	Energetic	Encompassing	Hard
	Enjoyable (Enjoyment)	Eventful	Hectic
	Enlightening	Exciting/Stressful	Hectic/Frustrating
	Eventful	Fast	Not excited
	Excited (Exciting)	Fine	Over it
	Exhilarating	Flexible	Overwhelming
	Fulfilling	Frustrating/Exciting	Rollercoaster
	Fun	Interesting	Stressful
	Funny	Never dull	Struggle
	Good	Never there	Sucked
	Grateful	Professional	Tiresome
	Interesting	Random	Tiring
	Motivated	Reflective	Unprepared
	Pleasant	Rewarding/Challenging	
	Pleased	Sprint	
	Prepared	Sub plans	
	Refreshed (Refreshing)	Unique	
	Relaxing		
	Rewarding		
	Thankful		

Once the monthly terms were categorized, the researcher triangulated the data using the individual annual reflection guide. This guide was completed during the summer at the end of each of the three school years. The guide directed teachers to reflect on their year, their accomplishments, and challenges, as well as their anticipations regarding the year to come. The teachers were asked to reflect on the highs and lows of their year teaching and identify specific points of the year when they recalled their attitude toward teaching changed and what factors contributed to those changes. Finally, the focus groups served as member reflections (Tracy, 2010), and invited the teachers to reflect on their year as a whole and identify where they felt similar to or different than their peers.

This study represents the individual experiences of each teacher and the collective experiences of this group of teachers. Stake (1995) described the collective case study as a tool to help understand the phenomenon experienced in various settings. It is important to remember this reflects the experiences of these individuals and this group of teachers and is not intended to be generalized but can prompt future research and contribute to theory.

Results

The first research question was to understand if the experiences of the teachers in this collective case study align with work by Ellen Moir (1990) and Rayfield et al. (2014). For this question, the thoughts shared by the teachers are represented collectively by coding the individual words teachers used to describe their attitude toward teaching as “positive,” “neutral,” or “negative” and looking at the collective attitude of the group toward teaching in Table 2. In year one there were eight participants, seven continued into year two, and six completed the three-year study. All teachers were White Anglo-Saxon and traditionally certified. Table 2 shows the teacher’s response to the question “describe your feelings about teaching in one word.” Some teachers shared more than one word, and the terms were documented accordingly. On rare occasions, a few teachers did

not have a word, so a term was selected from their dialogue to represent their feelings. The responses for each teacher, for each month of the three-year study, are displayed. Magnitude coding was used to categorize the term as positive, neutral, or negative based on the term and the conversation around it.

Table 2

Agriculture Teachers Attitude Toward Teaching by Month and Year from Monthly Interviews

	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May
Year 1										
Positive		Awesome (Wendy)	Enjoyment (Wendy)		Fulfilling (Helen)	Exhilarating (Sophia)				
		Enjoyable (Claudia)	Fun (Claudia)		Amazing (Sophia)	Fun (Claire)				
		Exciting (Hank)	Funny (Crystal)	Exciting (Sophia)	Fun (Crystal)					
Neutral				Eventful (Hank)	Busy (Paige)	Determined (Hank)		Exciting/Stressful (Paige)		Reflective (Claudia)
					Unique (Wendy)			Anticipation (Hank)		
Negative		Crazy (Sophia)	Challenging (Hank)	Exhausting (Claire)	Hectic (Claudia)	Stressful (Crystal)	Blur (Hank)	Hectic (Claudia)	Crazy (Claire)	Hectic (Claire)
		Challenging (Helen)	Challenging (Helen)	Tiring (Crystal)	Tiresome (Hank)	Challenging (Helen)	Challenging (Helen)	Busy (Helen)	Awful (Crystal)	Crazy (Hank)
		Stressful (Crystal)		Crazy (Paige)		Busy (Paige)	Crazy (Sophia)	Challenging* (Claire)	Overwhelming (Hank)	
			Hard* (Wendy)		Frustrating (Wendy)		Struggle* (Crystal)	Rollercoaster (Sophia)		
Year 2										
Positive		Adventurous (Paige)		Interesting/Eventful (Paige)	Refreshed (Hank)				Rewarding (Paige)	
		Exciting (Helen)	Exciting (Helen)	Exciting (Helen)	A Breeze (Crystal)				Fun (Claudia)	
		Prepared (Hank)	Adjusted (Hank)	Adventure (Helen)	Thankful (Claire)	Motivated (Claire)	Exciting (Helen)		Eventful (Paige)	Pleased (Claire)
Neutral			Rewarding (Claire)		Fun (Claudia)	Fun (Claudia)		Rewarding (Claire)	Comical (Crystal)	Fun (Helen)
		Eventful (Paige)		Better (Hank)	Challenging/Exciting (Helen)	Challenging/Fun (Paige)	Diverse (Claudia)	Diverse (Claudia)	Flexible (Hank)	Encompassing (Hank)
						Fast (Hank)	Professional (Hank)	Flexible* (Hank)		Rewarding/Challenging (Paige)
Negative		Challenging (Claudia)	Frustrating (Claudia)	Chaotic (Claudia)	Frustrating (Wendy)	Frustrating (Wendy)	Challenging (Claire)	Stressful (Crystal)	Frustrating (Claire)	Rollercoaster (Crystal)
		Unprepared (Claire)	Frustrating (Hank)	Tiresome (Crystal)	Not excited (Crystal)		Frustrating (Wendy)	Busy (Paige)	Busy (Helen)	Frustrating (Wendy)
		Exhausting (Wendy)	Exhausting (Wendy)	Busy (Paige)				Exhausting (Wendy)	Frustrating (Wendy)	
			Hectic (Wendy)	Not excited* (Crystal)						
Year 3										
Positive		Exciting (Wendy)	Fun (Helen)			Easy (Paige)			Excited (Crystal)	
		Excited (Crystal)	Good (Crystal)			Enlightening (Helen)	Relaxing (Paige)		Pleased (Claire)	Relaxing (Paige)
		Excited (Claire)	Energetic (Claire)			Exciting (Claudia)	Exciting (Helen)		Fun (Claudia)	Refreshing (Helen)
Neutral		Random (Helen)	Never There (Paige)	Busy (Paige)	Calm before the Storm (Crystal)	Fine (Crystal)	Rewarding/Challenging (Wendy)		Adaptable (Helen)	
				Interesting (Wendy)	Frustrating/Exciting (Paige)	Sprint (Claire)		Diverse (Claudia)		
					Busy (Paige)	Fine (Crystal)		Sub Plans (Paige)		
Negative		Tiring (Paige)	Hectic (Wendy)	Frustrating (Claudia)	Tiring (Claudia)	Chaos (Claudia)	Challenging (Claire)	Overwhelming (Claudia)	Over it (Crystal)	Chaotic (Paige)
				Exhausting (Claire)	Challenging (Helen)	Frustrating (Wendy)		Hectic (Claire)	Frustrating (Claire)	Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)
				Exhausting (Helen)	Chaotic (Wendy)			Annoying (Crystal)	Challenging (Helen)	
							Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Hectic (Wendy)		

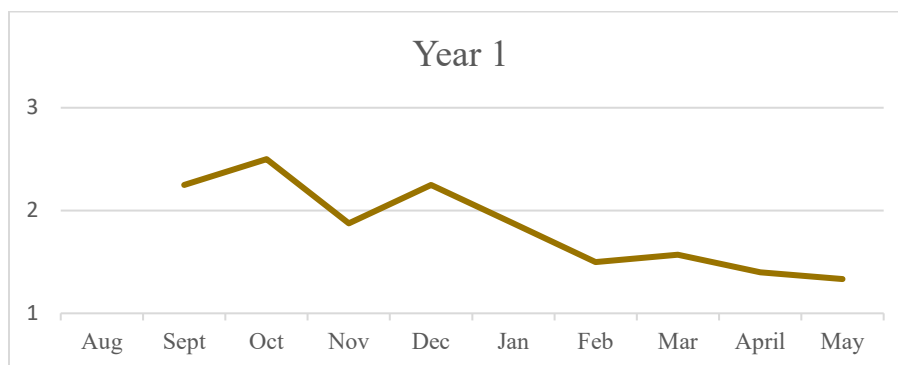
Note. *Identifies words gathered from the transcript, when not provided by the teacher

Year 1

Eight teachers completed the first year of the study. Year one for the teachers could be described as a “rollercoaster” (Moir, 1990) possessing many highs and lows, perhaps several in a month, week, or even a day. It is important to note that year one initial interviews did not happen until September to allow the teachers time to get settled in their schools before the on-site visit, therefore, there is no information for their attitude toward teaching as they began their first school year in August. To generate a visual representation of their attitudinal shifts toward teaching, terms were coded to a numeric value and charted to show the change from month to month. The terms and numeric codes used are included in Table 1, positive terms were coded with a “3”, neutral with a “2” and negative with a “1.” Some notable themes emerged, five of the teachers described September as “exciting” (Hank & Claire), “awesome” (Wendy), “adventurous” (Paige) and “enjoyable” (Claudia), however, others did not start out as enthusiastic, instead they used terms like “crazy” (Sophia), “challenging” (Helen) and “stressful” (Crystal). In October and November, there was a shift as the teachers worked to balance the many roles of agriculture teachers. The teachers described this specific time as “exhausting” (Claire), “tiring” (Crystal), “crazy” (Paige) and “hard” (Wendy). In contrast, a few remained “excited” (Sophia & Helen), Claudia even said it was “easy.” There was another shift in their attitude towards teaching to more neutral-positive in conversations with the teachers in late December which showed their attitudes toward teaching improved with four positive and two feeling neutral, although they were “busy” (Paige) and the experience was “unique” (Wendy), other words were more positive such as “fulfilling” (Helen), “amazing” (Sophia), “fun” (Crystal) and Claire felt “accomplished.” Claudia and Hank were less positive using “hectic” (Claudia) and “tiresome” (Hank) to describe their attitude toward teaching. Within the month of January, another shift occurred. While three remained overall positive, four shifted to negative. Conversations at the beginning of the month focused on the “fun” (Crystal & Claudia) and Claire felt “accomplished” but toward the end of January and leading into February it became “stressful” (Crystal) “challenging” (Helen), “busy” (Paige) and “crazy” (Sophia). For a majority of the teachers, their attitude toward teaching was low through the end of the semester. Their attitudes toward teaching were neutral to negative using terms such as “hectic” (Claudia), “overwhelming” (Hank), and “awful” (Crystal) to describe the remainder of the spring semester. However, there were teachers who had individual high points in the months of February, March, and April described as “good” for Sophia and “interesting” for Claudia in both February and April. The collective teachers’ attitudinal shifts throughout the first year are displayed in Figure 3 by utilizing magnitude coding to transform the terms into values to create a visual representation to compare to Moir (1990) and Rayfield et al.’s (2014) figures.

Figure 3

Collective Teachers Attitudes Toward Teaching for Year 1 Based on Monthly Interviews

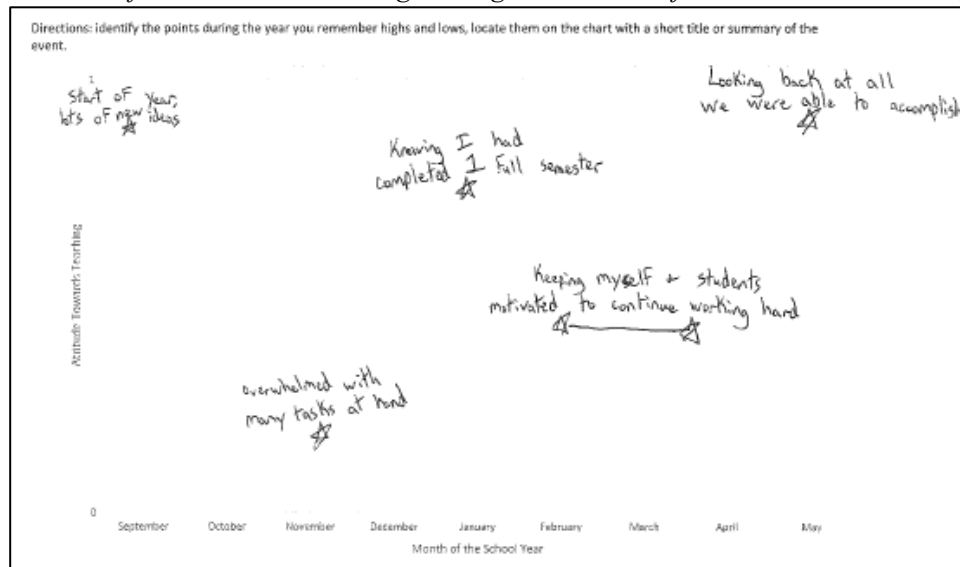


The collective experiences of the beginning agriculture teachers in year one as shown in Figure 3 were similar to the beginning of Moir’s (1990) phases. Although year one data for August was not available, September was described as exciting by the agriculture teachers consistent with the “anticipation” stage Moir (1990) describes. Like Moir’s model (1990), there was an attitudinal shift in November, but the shift up happened much sooner for the agriculture teachers, in December, rather than March. In contrast to Moir, February began a decline in their attitudes toward teaching that did not recover in March as Moir described. There are no transcripts for June and July to compare the “anticipation” stage Moir (1990) suggested.

The monthly interviews were followed with a reflection guide teachers completed before their focus group. In the reflection guides, the teachers responded to questions about their first-year teaching and charted the highs and lows of their year. The teachers described the beginning of the year as a “high” based on the start of a year. Hank was excited for “new ideas” and Claudia recalled “everyone being supportive” that allowed them to start the year on a high note. In contrast, Crystal felt September and October were “rough, students were not used to change.” The teachers identified November on the charts as a “low” when they were overwhelmed returning from National FFA Convention and working on fundraisers. Claire said November “fluctuated” for her, it was a very busy month. This feeling lasted into early December when community events and fundraising demanded additional time. January was a highlight as Wendy was “excited to come back after break.” Claire and Paige cited the start of a new semester as exciting while Hank felt accomplished knowing he had completed one full semester. In contrast, Crystal felt November-January was good and she had “found her rhythm.” February through April was a “very busy time” stated Wendy. Hank was focused on “keeping myself and students motivated to continue to work hard.” The end of the year presented mixed emotions for the teachers, Wendy, Paige, and Crystal represented their attitude as lower through the end of the year. However, Hank, Claire, and Claudia saw the end of the semester as a higher point. This is represented in Figure 4, an excerpt from Hank’s reflection guide showing the highs and lows of his year.

Figure 4

Hank’s Reflection Guide Charting the Highs and Lows of His First Year Teaching



Data collection concluded with the online focus group meeting. During that meeting as teachers reflected on their year as a whole, they specifically cited getting busy in the fall and it felt

like it never really slowed down after that, other than breaks from school. Wendy described it like this,

I would have to say the most stressful time that I had was probably around fruit meat sales and National Convention time. It was just a lot at once and I mean when you don't know what you're doing and you're trying to do your best it's kind of hard.

Claire specifically remembered feeling overwhelmed in the fall.

I will have to agree with Wendy, like I felt really stressed-out in November because we had leadership school, we had fruit and meats sales it was my first year doing it and I just felt like it was constantly a go, go, go... I was just out in the shop and I cried because I was like this is ridiculous, I'm killing myself and why am I doing this and I just had to remind myself that I have really great students and a good community support obviously like where we sold all this fruit and obviously they wanted to support our program but it just felt like everything hit at once and I was just done.

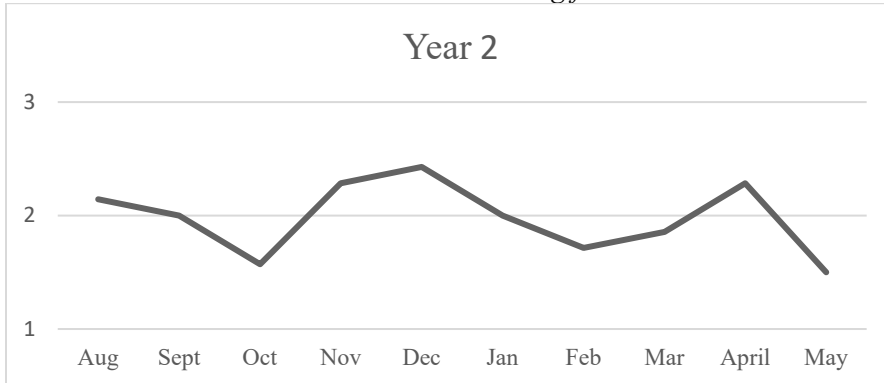
The winter break was a much-needed morale boost for the teachers and then similar challenges were faced mid-spring semester. Claudia took on some additional responsibilities with track causing her spring to be especially hectic, “for some stupid reason, I decided to coach middle school track in the spring it was busiest time for contest and banquets and FFA...so, needless to say, I just resigned from track, but I learned my lesson.” Wendy also reflected on the chaos of the spring, “you get to springtime, and it seems like it's just as busy and just as crazy anyways. So, it's kind of hard to – I don't feel like there is really a downtime so, yeah, but that's how I felt.” For the teachers, it felt like an ongoing struggle throughout the year and the only breaks were when there was an actual break in the school year.

Year 2

In year two, there were seven teachers who completed the study. There were mixed attitudes towards teaching as teachers started their second year in August. Some felt “prepared” (Hank) “excited” (Helen) and “pleasant” (Crystal). Others felt the opposite, rather “unprepared” (Claire), “challenged” (Claudia) and “exhausted” (Wendy). The collective feeling of the group was slightly positive. Their overall attitude toward teaching declined from August to October. The teachers felt “busy” (Paige) it was “chaotic” (Claudia) and “hectic” (Wendy), but Helen described it more positively as an “adventure” while Claire too whose attitude improved, describing it as “rewarding.” Overall, their attitudes increased in November when four teachers described their attitude as positive using words such as “thankful” (Claire) “rewarding” (Claudia) and “exciting” (Helen). In December, the conversations happened just prior to or during winter break when another shift happened with five teachers feeling more positive, one neutral and one negative. The teachers were feeling “motivated” (Claire), “refreshed” (Hank) and “motivated” (Claire) with only Wendy feeling “frustrated.” As they returned to school in January and through February the attitudes were neutral, described as “fast” (Hank) and “fine” (Crystal) while others felt “busy” (Paige) and “stressful” (Crystal). March and April brought increased positive attitude toward teaching such as “rewarding” (Paige), “fun” (Claudia) and “pleased” (Claire). There were individual experiences that did not share the same attitude toward teaching including Wendy who did not experience a shift in attitude and described her experiences as “exhausted” and “frustrated” through February, March, and April. Collectively, the teachers had a similar first semester to the year before but described April of the second year overall more positively than their first year. The attitudinal shifts each teacher experienced are summarized collectively in Figure 5 by using magnitude coding to transfer the terms into values for visual representation.

Figure 5

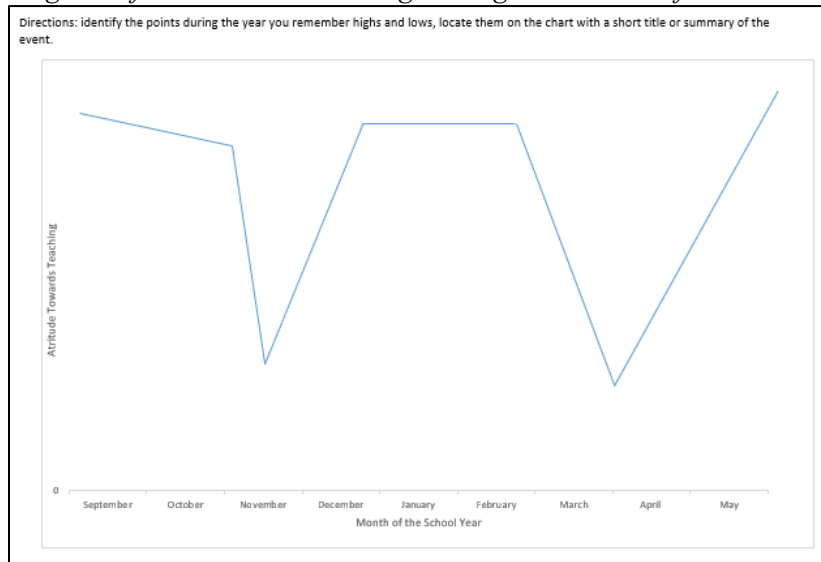
Collective Teachers Attitudes Toward Teaching for Year 2 Based on Monthly Interviews



Once again, the monthly interviews were followed by an individual end-of-year written reflection and focus group to reflect on year two. For Paige, the beginning of the year was once again exciting. Claudia recalled being a bit more reserved at the beginning of the year because she was teaching a couple of new classes. In October, November, and December there were some challenges with student attitudes and the fall fundraising chaos was challenging again. Once again, December ended in a high that led into the beginning of the next semester. Claudia had a special highlight in February as she was selected for the Kansas Department of Education “Horizon Award” for beginning teachers. However, that highlight was followed with the “craziness” of March and April and then Claudia cited in April there was “literally not one day on the calendar without anything on it.” The challenges were heightened by an overall lack of motivation for both teacher and students. Paige described March and April as a busy time which made it “hard for me to stay positive in the classroom when I was gone so much.” May once again brought excitement of welding with students, successful plant sales and a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the year. Figure 6 shows how Paige visually represented the highs and lows of her second-year teaching.

Figure 6

Paige’s Reflection Guide Charting the Highs and Lows of Her Second Year Teaching



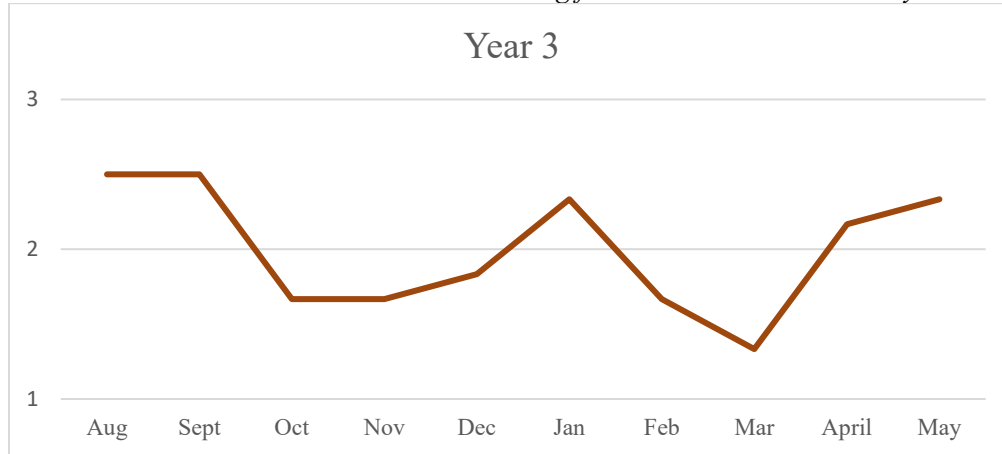
As the teachers reflected on year two as a group, they admitted year two was easier, Paige said "I definitely think that year two was a lot easier for the fact – I think the stress was a little bit less." However, the feeling of increased confidence in preparing lessons, knowing what to expect was sometimes a detriment because they also shared a feeling they got "caught" relying on that experience sometimes and they realized too late they were not as prepared as they thought they were. Here is how Wendy described it,

Like Claudia said, I wasn't quite as prepared like you've been through before, so you didn't feel like you need to prepare quite as much. And so, you're just like, 'Oh, okay, I can get through this.' And then halfway through you're like, 'Oh, crap, I probably should have done just a little bit more.'

Time moved faster and the job got easier. There was less pressure because the students, community, school, and parents had worked with the teachers previously and they no longer constantly felt as if they had to make a good first impression at all costs. Those teachers that changed schools between year one and two felt they experienced year "1.5" feeling more confident in some areas and more like a first-year teacher again in other situations. Overall, the year was admittedly easier than year one but came with some surprising challenges.

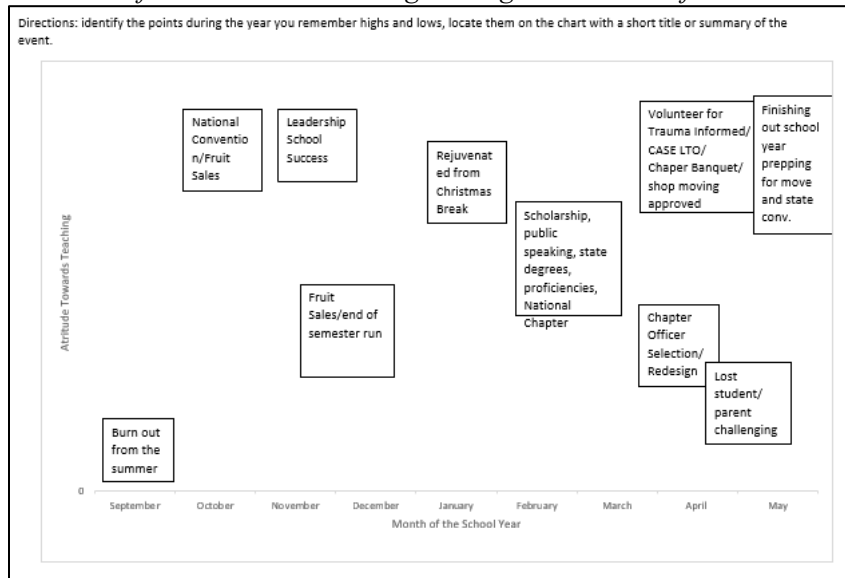
Year 3

In the final year, six of the original teachers completed the study. The beginning of year three was described as "exciting" (Wendy, Crystal, Claire & Claudia) with Helen more neutral with "random" and Paige more negative with "tiring" and this trend continued through September. However, October and November shifted more toward neutral and negative attitudes described as "exhausting" (Claire & Helen), "frustrating and tiring" (Claudia) and "chaotic" (Wendy). Crystal described her neutral as the "calm before the storm." Only one teacher was positive in each of the months of October, November, and December. These attitudes lasted through December, but there was an overall shift to a more positive attitude in January as described as "easy" (Paige) and "exciting" (Claudia). In January, Wendy and Crystal were neutral while Claire was feeling "challenged." The positive trend was temporary, as their attitudes shifted through the month of February with four of the six teachers feeling more negative using terms such as "overwhelmed" (Claudia), "hectic" (Claire & Wendy) and "annoying" (Crystal). Their attitude toward teaching in March was described as neutral including "sub plans" (Paige) and "diverse" (Claudia) with the remainder of the teachers feeling negative using terms such as "over it" (Crystal), "frustrating" (Claire), "hectic" (Wendy) and "challenging" (Helen). In April, a slight shift to positive occurred as they described the year coming to an end. Half of the teachers responded positively describing their feeling as "pleased" (Claire), "excited" (Crystal) and it is "fun" (Claudia). The feeling was collective, but not shared by all. Once again Wendy's experiences were less positive describing it as "hectic" and "frustrating" from February through April. Their collective changes in their attitudes toward teaching in year three are represented in Figure 7 by using magnitude coding to transfer the terms into values for visual representation.

Figure 7*Individual Teachers Attitudes Toward Teaching for Year 3 Based on Monthly Interviews*

The final reflection guide and focus group were completed at the end of the third year. Participants described their third year as beginning with a high, Crystal was excited about new administration, Helen had “motivated officers” and Wendy was excited to have “new things and new students.” In contrast, Claire was feeling burnt out from the summer, she participated in extensive professional development and did not feel she was as ready for the school year as she would like to be. October was a high for Helen as her chapter attended their first National FFA Convention in several years. However, October was a low for Crystal as she worked to balance FFA and Dance Team responsibilities and tried to figure out the expectations of a new administration. Once again, November and early December were challenging with “food sales chaos” as described by Claudia, and Helen described students “starting to lose focus” with a break coming up. January allowed for a “rejuvenation from Christmas break” as described by Claire, but quickly became challenging with applications for Wendy. Crystal also faced some challenges by having a trip to Denver for the Stock Show cancelled by the administration due to weather. For Crystal, February and March were more positive as she witnessed student success in competitions. April was challenging with officer team transitions, career development events, and a student death. Claudia described April as being “incredibly overwhelmed by everything.” Once again, some described the end of the year as a high finishing out the school year, but others felt it was overwhelming to the end. Claire described her year in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Claire's Reflection Guide Charting the Highs and Lows of Her Third Year Teaching

During the focus group for year three, the teachers talked about the “roller coaster” once again. Crystal described it as, “one month it would be ‘I’m over it’ or it would be like ‘I love it,’”

Helen talked about the increased expectations of the community now that she was more established in the program, “your third year, you’ve already started to establish yourself in the community. I don’t live in the community where I work, and so that was kind of hard for me to like build relationships.” Another added challenge was an overall lack of motivation by students in the classroom and not engaging with FFA events as they had in the past.

However, the year as a whole must be considered, Claudia said, “It’s dependent on what’s going on that month...I feel like some of mine this year and most of my last year are probably pretty negative, but thinking back now on the school year, it’s really not as bad as I thought it was.”

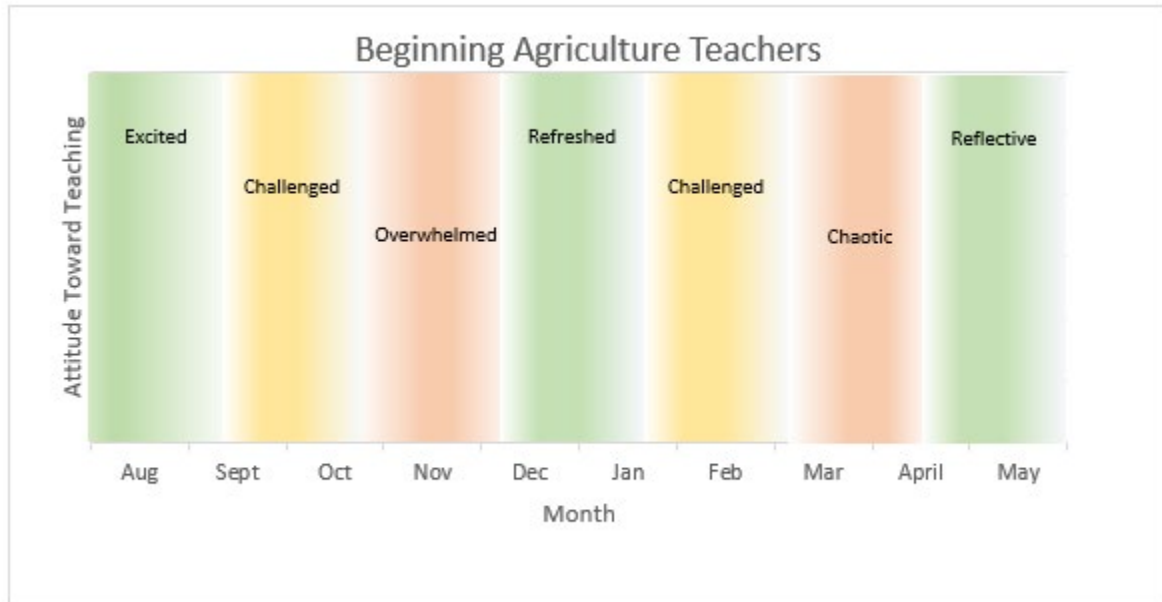
The information from the monthly interviews must be considered in perspective with the reflection guide and focus group data to gain a holistic view of their attitudinal shifts throughout the year. On a day-to-day basis, it seemed the lows could be very low, and the highs could be very high, but when reflecting on the year as a whole, the teachers had a more positive attitude toward teaching than perhaps the monthly check-ins represented.

To summarize the results related to research question two, to understand how beginning teachers’ attitudes toward teaching change throughout the first three years of their teaching career, Figure 9 represents the collective shifts in attitude toward teaching in the first three years. Magnitude coding was used to connect the terms to a value to visually represent the shifts teachers experienced in a similar way to Moir (1990) and Rayfield et al.’s (2014) figures. The colors represent positive (green), neutral (yellow) and negative (red) phases the teachers experienced. The shading of the colors is important to represent that not all teachers felt the shifts at the exact same time, but they moved through similar phases. For example, some began to feel the “slump” (Rutherford, 2006) in October, where others it was November. There was a strong theme of feeling “refreshed” during the winter break. The terms used to describe each of the phases were common

themes used to describe the phase by the teachers from Table 2 and the terms were placed on the tables higher when there was a shift to positive feelings and lower when there was shift to more negative feelings.

Figure 9

Beginning Agriculture Teachers' Attitude Toward Teaching During an Academic Year



Building from the information gained in year one, it was then combined with data from years two and three to create individual and collective shifts in the attitude toward teaching throughout the first three years. Triangulation was achieved by comparing those terms to the individual reflection guide the teachers completed at the end of each year. In the reflection guide, the teachers were asked to chart the highs and lows and identify factors they remembered when reflecting on the year as a whole. This provided additional clarity on their attitudinal shifts from month to month and how they compared to their annual reflection of the year. Finally, the focus group transcripts were referenced to understand their attitude toward teaching as they reflected on the entire year. As a group, the teachers talked about the notable events that caused a more positive or negative feeling in their attitude toward teaching.

Conclusions

The beginning agriculture teachers experienced some similarities to Moir's model (1990) during September, October, and November as the teachers hit the "slump" of coming out of parent/teacher conferences and working with unmotivated students leading into fall break and it appeared to be further compounded by the events and activities related to agricultural education (National Convention, district FFA events, and fall fundraising). However, that is where the similarities end, as the teachers had different experiences than what Moir (1990) described from December through the conclusion of the school year. Moir's graphic shows there was a consistent increase in the teacher's attitude toward teaching in the second semester, peaking at the conclusion of the semester. For the teachers in this study, there was a recovery, a rejuvenation experienced in late December/early January as they returned from winter break, but they quickly discussed the agriculture-specific responsibilities they were balancing that caused a decline in their attitudes

toward teaching. They hit another “slump” around March similar to the one in November. How the year ended was unique to the teacher, some experienced a “recovery” in their attitudes toward teaching as the end of the year approached and others felt the stress and pressure through to the end of the academic year. Moir’s (1990) model did not describe the majority of the first-year teaching experiences reflected by this group of teachers.

Rayfield et al. (2014) found “minor changes in attitude among respondents occurred...but did not experience the high level of fluctuation by Moir” (pg. 147), whereas the present qualitative study does find major fluctuations, but at different times than Moir suggested. However, Rayfield’s et al. (2014) overall finding of a “feeling generally positive in attitudes toward their career” (pg. 147) does align with the findings of the present study. When examining the time of fluctuations in the Rayfield et al. (2014) study, the decline in attitude toward teaching in November and the incline in December followed by a decrease in February and a final increase at the end of the year also supported the present study. The “rollercoaster” of highs and lows in attitudinal changes were similar but were more noteworthy in this qualitative study. The second and third years of teaching for these early professionals had several similarities that happened at slightly different, but related times.

This study was designed to learn about induction teachers’ attitudes toward teaching during two different timeframes, one was during the monthly interview providing an in the moment snapshot perspective of their attitude toward teaching. The second, an end of the year review, reflects holistically on the year. Overall, the teachers expressed more extreme reactions during the monthly interviews than when compared to their reflections on the year. Although at both times the teachers easily identified highs and lows, they described them as being less extreme when reflecting back on the year during the focus group than when they were describing their attitude toward teaching in the moment during the monthly interviews. As we inform mentors and supporters of beginning teachers, it is important to understand the differences between how the teachers may feel on one single day versus how they reflect on the year as a whole.

The annual reflection guides identified the beginning of the year as a high point, and identified November as one of, if not the most, challenging months of the year. Reflection guides also represent the end of the year relief described by some of the teachers, although it was rarely mentioned in year one. In the second and third years, some felt the end of the year relief earlier than others, but all described possessing a reflective attitude. In the third-year focus group, the teachers talked about the ups and downs being present, but less significant when they reflected on the year as a whole in comparison to the month-to-month discussions. The phases throughout the year were based on the monthly interview descriptions and enhanced by the annual reflection guides and focus group descriptions of their experiences. The terms used to describe the phases in Figure 9 are from the teacher’s descriptions based on the words they used to describe their attitudes toward teaching.

When looking at the attitudinal shifts that occurred in years two and three for this group of teachers, there are similarities. There is consistency of starting the year with a relatively positive attitude, followed by a downward shift in October and a positive swing in late December/early January. The upward trend experienced in January is followed by a downward shift in late February/early March with a final positive swing as the end of the school year approaches. It is interesting to note the attitudinal shifts for the teachers were very similar between the four semesters for their second and third years of teaching. Based on the monthly interviews, these beginning agriculture teachers had different experiences in each of their three years, but there were more differences when comparing year one with years two and three than when comparing year two to year three, which were relatively similar in their attitudinal shifts.

As displayed in Figure 9, collectively, the teachers started each year with *excitement*, and that word was the one used most frequently to describe the beginning of each year. However, the excitement wore off and they were quickly *challenged* by the growing demands of their position. Other terms they used to describe this time included “busy” and “frustrating.” The classroom activities were ramping up, FFA events and activities were beginning, and many were finalizing plans to attend the National FFA Convention. After returning from the National FFA Convention, trying to catch up in the classroom and being faced with fall fundraising events, the teachers became *overwhelmed*. This was further impacted by the students being less engaged leading up to both fall and winter breaks. This feeling of being overwhelmed lasted late into the semester. However, their attitudes changed during winter break. They entered the new semester feeling accomplished having completed the fall semester and *refreshed* after a break. Once again, they were quickly focused on *challenges* as the demands of the agricultural education program increased in February, with FFA Week celebrations, award applications and career development events demanding much of their time. The challenge impacted the classroom as well. The *chaos* really took over after spring break when the entire school was busy with extra-curricular events alongside the district and state FFA events that kept them out of the classroom as well. For some teachers, they recovered a bit at the end of the year and others felt the chaos through the final days. Finally, they entered the *reflection* stage as they looked back on the year and made goals for the future. It is important to note the length of time when each teacher entered a specific phase and how long they spent in each phase was unique to their individual experience.

Recommendations and Implications

Individuals working with beginning agriculture teachers should familiarize themselves and the beginning teachers with the possible “rollercoaster” experience they may have in their first year (Moir, 1990). Induction programs should be mindful of the “highs” and “lows” of teachers’ attitudes toward teaching, and the stage of the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* the teachers are in (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) when planning induction events. For example, hosting in-person or online meetings in early October will likely find the teachers just beginning to face challenges. Support in this timeframe should be provided to help teachers prepare for the impact they may face in November. Keeping the schedules of these teachers in mind, it would have been very challenging for them to engage in “extra” professional development activities in November. However, capitalizing on the “refreshed” feeling of the late December/early January timeline could benefit the teachers in conducting reflection and goal setting exercises for the next semester. Once again, guided by these teachers’ experiences, professional development after February would present challenges to their engagement and focus, but meeting in early February could be beneficial to again strategize how they could plan for the challenges that may be headed their way. Finally, helping beginning teachers engage in a reflection of the entire year may assist them to see the “big picture” of their first-year teaching experience rather than focusing on the extreme highs and lows. These experiences were unique to this group of teachers but could aid mentors to support other beginning agriculture teachers who may face similar challenges.

Consistent with Greiman et al.’s (2005) suggestion, mentors working with early career teachers should also be made aware of the highs and lows beginning teachers may face. The mentors could also be coached to step in and provide support and strategies beginning teachers could use to cope with the most challenging times.

To further understand the agriculture teachers’ unique experiences, a similar study should be conducted with mid and late-career professionals to determine whether the “roller coaster” (Moir, 1990) of events continues beyond the beginning teacher stages. This research could be

aligned with the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* (Fessler & Christensen, 1992) to examine teachers who are in different stages of the profession.

There is a growing need to understand alternatively certified agriculture teachers. This study was limited to traditionally certified graduates. The experiences of alternatively certified agriculture teachers should be explored to see if they align or are different, as Ingersoll (2002) stated underprepared teachers have an increased chance of leaving the profession. Therefore, understanding alternatively certified teachers needs is even more critical to the teacher retention puzzle.

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