

The lived experiences of traditionally certified agriculture teachers through their first three years  
of teaching: A phenomenological longitudinal study

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2001  
M.S., Kansas State University, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
College of Education

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## Abstract

This longitudinal qualitative study sought to understand the experiences of traditionally certified agriculture teachers in rural Kansas communities through their first three years of teaching. The research was guided by the following questions: 1) how do participants describe their feelings toward teaching as a career, 2) what do participants perceive as their accomplishments and challenges related to teaching and managing an agricultural education program and 3) how do participants describe their relationships and interactions with mentors?

The study is guided by the theoretical framework of Ellen Moir's (1999) *The Stages of a Teacher's First Year* which shows teachers move through a series of stages during their first-year teaching. Fessler and Christensen (1992) proposed the *Teacher Career Cycle* including phases specific to the beginning teacher. Recent literature in the agricultural education field influenced the content including seeking teacher perceptions and attitudes toward teaching, accomplishments, challenges, school, and community support, FFA, SAE and their mentoring experience (Boone & Boone, 2007; Myers et al., 2005).

The three-year phenomenological case study began with a ½ day researcher visit to each school scheduled between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> week of classes. The visit included a tour of the school and agriculture program, introductions with the administrator, an observation of the teacher teaching, and an interview. Data collected during the visit included photographs of the agriculture facilities, a documented observation of one class and a recorded 30-minute semi-structured interview. The researcher conducted monthly semi-structured phone interviews through the academic year with each individual participant. The year concluded with participants completing an individual reflection guide and a 1-hour semi-structured focus group held via Zoom. The same methods were used in years two and three except only teachers who initiated

employment with a new school were visited. Data for the three-year study yielded 11 in-person teacher observations, 29 photos, 19 reflection guides, three focus group transcripts, and 129 individual monthly interview transcripts.

A collective case study design was used to represent the experiences of this unique group of teachers. The findings address areas in which the profession should support beginning agriculture teachers including increased feedback and mentoring for teachers, resources on student management, work/life balance, seeking funding and community relations.

Based on the individual and collective experiences of the teachers, at the beginning of the year their experiences followed a similar path to Moir's phases of first year teachers' attitudes toward teaching (1990). However, following the mid-fall semester "slump" the agriculture teachers in their first, second and third years had a different experience than Moir suggested. They experienced a second spring semester "slump" in the first, second and third-years teaching. While some teachers finished the year strong, others struggled to the end. The teachers described their feeling as more extreme in the monthly interviews but held an overall positive attitude toward teaching when reflecting on the year at the end of each of the three years.

Implications for practice include proposing the structure and content to be considered when developing an induction program for beginning agriculture teachers including developing a supportive community among the teachers, as needed resources, multiple mentors, feedback on teaching, and structured reflection. Recommendations for future research suggests studying the shift from teacher centered to student centered learning, how novice teachers gauge their success, the impact of staff and administrator relationships on job satisfaction, challenges establishing SAE's, work/life balance versus work/life integration and teaching resources utilized by novice teachers.

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Shannon G. Washburn

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## **Dedication**

To Brigham and Brock, believe in yourself and your ability to do hard things. Set big goals and work towards them relentlessly.

# **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

## **Introduction**

There exists a shortage of teachers (Ingersoll, 2002; Sutchter, et al. 2016), including agriculture teachers, nationwide (Camp, 2002; Foster et al., 2016; Kantrovich, 2010; Smith et al., 2017, 2018, 2019). Recruitment efforts are under way 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, 2010). Mentoring and early career support programs exist across the country, but their layout, methods and resources vary (Burriss et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Lamm et al., 2020; Pfund, 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 longitudinal qualitative study on the needs of agriculture teachers works to gather the information needed to increase retention, design induction programs, and guide mentorship.

## **Rationale**

Nationally there has been an ongoing shortage of teachers, including school-based agriculture education (SBAE) teachers. The National Supply and Demand Study of 2018 cited “Additional teachers were still needed to meet demand in SBAE; state supervisors reported 61 full time and 10 part-time vacancies as of September 15, 2018. Further, substantial growth and expansion in school-based agricultural education occurred nationwide in 2017-2018 with 247 new positions and 140 new programs added” (Smith et al., 2019, p.2). During this same time, 88 agricultural education positions were lost, but there was still a notable net increase in the demand

for teachers. This identifies two reasons for the shortage 1) a lack of agricultural education teachers and 2) an increase in the number of SBAE programs nationally.

One factor that could change the current environment is to focus efforts on retention of novice agriculture teachers in the classroom. According to the 2018 National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, 46.7 percent of teachers who left the agriculture teaching profession left to pursue other career interests (Smith et al., 2019). In Kansas in 2018, 28 teachers left the agriculture teaching profession and at least 19 entered other professions (Smith et al., 2019). In order to support the novice agriculture teachers, national and state leaders must learn what the experiences of the first few years in the classroom are really like, through the eyes of the novice teachers themselves. According to Talbert et al. (1994, pg.31) “the nature of the experiences during the first year are often pivotal in the eventual success or failure of the beginning teacher” (p. 31). Agriculture teachers specifically juggle different responsibilities than other high school teachers. Learning about the successes and challenges of the novice agriculture teacher can inform individuals who coordinate novice teacher programs that work to increase teacher satisfaction and retention.

In conclusion, with the growing demand for agricultural education teachers along with a corresponding nationwide shortage in positions, there is need to engage in research that helps find solutions for recruitment, induction, and retention. Currently, the research on induction, beginning, and novice agriculture teachers is limited. Research that is longitudinal in depth and explores the specific experiences of these teachers is lacking. Therefore, there exists a void in research that is qualitative in nature, follows agriculture teachers throughout their novice teaching years and highlights their personal experiences.

## **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of a cohort of novice agriculture teachers who graduated from a Midwestern university. Specifically, this research works to better understand their perceptions around their experiences that can impact induction and retention programs for agricultural educators.

The following questions provided direction to the research process:

- How do participants describe their feelings towards teaching as a career?
- What do participants perceive as their accomplishments and challenges related to teaching and managing an agricultural education program?
- How do participants describe their relationships and interactions with mentors?

## **Operationalization of Constructs**

For the purpose of this research, the following terms are defined as:

*Agricultural Education Program*– An Agricultural Education program includes three components, classroom/laboratory experiences, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects (where students learn career skills) and a local chapter of the National FFA Organization (to provide students leadership development and experience).

*Constructionism*– “A collective generation and transmission of meaning” (Crotty, 2015, p. 58).

*Constructivism*– “The meaning making activity of the individual mind” (Crotty, 2015, p. 58).

*Induction Teachers*– Teachers in their first year of their career.

*Novice Teacher*– Teachers in the first three years of their career.

*Urban*- “Cities with a population of 50,000 or more” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019, para. 2).

*Urban Cluster*– “Clusters with a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019, para. 2).

*Rural*– “Any population, housing or territory NOT in an urban area” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019, para. 2).

*School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE)*– Organized instruction of agriculture happening in 6-12 grade schools.

*Traditionally Certified Teachers*– Teachers who complete an undergraduate or graduate agricultural education degree with a traditional student teaching experience.

*Non-Traditionally Certified Teachers*– Teachers who enter the classroom through an alternative means, by exam, through documented experience or obtaining teacher certification while teaching.

### **Limitations and Possibilities of the Study**

The results of this study can inform professionals and professional organizations who work to support novice agriculture teachers. This information can redefine the ways in which novice teachers may be supported, what tools and information may be helpful, how they need support and when during the school year specific pieces of information are needed. This study hopes to open a window into the lives of these novice agriculture teachers in order to learn about their classroom and life experiences during the early years of their career.

This study is limited to the experiences of these individuals. While the lived experiences may be similar to other novice agriculture teacher’s experiences, they each work in a unique school and community with their own unique personal backgrounds and experiences. In addition, the researcher has substantial experiences in the field of agricultural education that may influence the results of this study.

## **Dissertation Organization**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the study including the rationale for the research, research purpose, operationalization of constructs and limits and possibilities of the study. Chapter two focuses on the review of literature and is organized by theme. Chapter three outlines the methodology including the researcher subjectivity statement, epistemological and theoretical perspective, rigor and trustworthiness, theoretical framework, participation selection, data collection and analysis.

Chapters four through six are a series of three articles. Chapter four is an article titled “Successes and Challenges Experienced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in their First Three Years: A Collective Case Study” and addresses the second research question “what do participants perceive as their accomplishments and challenges related to teaching and managing an agricultural education program.” This article includes key findings organized by year and themes.

Chapter five is an article titled “Induction Programs for Beginning Agriculture Teachers: Research-based Recommendations on Program Structure and Content.” This article addresses research question three “how do participants describe their relationships and interactions with mentors?” and expands to outline what a comprehensive beginning agriculture teacher program might include based on the needs of beginning teachers.

Chapter six is an article titled “A Qualitative Analysis of Agriculture Teacher’s Attitude Toward Teaching: Does Moir’s Model Apply?” This article addresses research question one, how do participants describe their feelings toward teaching? By exploring how teachers describe their attitude towards teaching on a monthly and annual basis throughout their first three years of teaching we can begin to understand their experiences. This article proposes a model to represent

how their attitudes change throughout an academic year. Chapter seven includes the general, holistic conclusions and recommendations of the entire research study and includes areas of emphasis beyond the scope addressed by chapters four through six.

## **Conclusion**

There is a shortage of agriculture teachers in the United States and one of the ways to help resolve that issue is to research the lived experience of novice agriculture teachers. One reason for the agriculture teacher shortage is the loss of teachers early in their career. If teachers were supported better early in their career through induction and mentoring programs, perhaps the number of teachers leaving during their early years in the profession would decrease. A longitudinal qualitative phenomenological case study will provide the in-depth information needed to truly learn what the novice agriculture teachers experience. The data from this study will inform professionals who provide induction programs and mentoring to novice teachers at the state and national level.

## **Chapter 2 - Review of Literature**

As previously stated, the shortage of teachers and specifically agriculture teachers has been established (Camp, 2002; Foster et al., 2016; Ingersoll, 2002; Kantrovich, 2010; Smith et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). Solutions to this challenge are harder to establish. Literature exists that highlights qualitative and quantitative research on teachers of various fields in education. However, the research conducted on induction, beginning, and novice agriculture teachers is widely limited to quantitative studies. Even more rare are longitudinal qualitative studies, especially within the agriculture education profession. Therefore, there exists a void in research that is qualitative in nature and follows agriculture teachers through their novice teaching years. Factors in the literature base which influence teachers and specifically agriculture teachers can be organized in the following categories: influences on the teacher's attitude toward their career, program management, student relationships, management and motivation, curriculum and planning, time management, work/life balance, school culture, community culture, administration and faculty relationships, additional responsibilities, isolation, professional development, the role and influence of mentors and programing. The extensive research in these areas is summarized in the sections to follow.

### **Influences on Teachers' Attitude toward Their Careers**

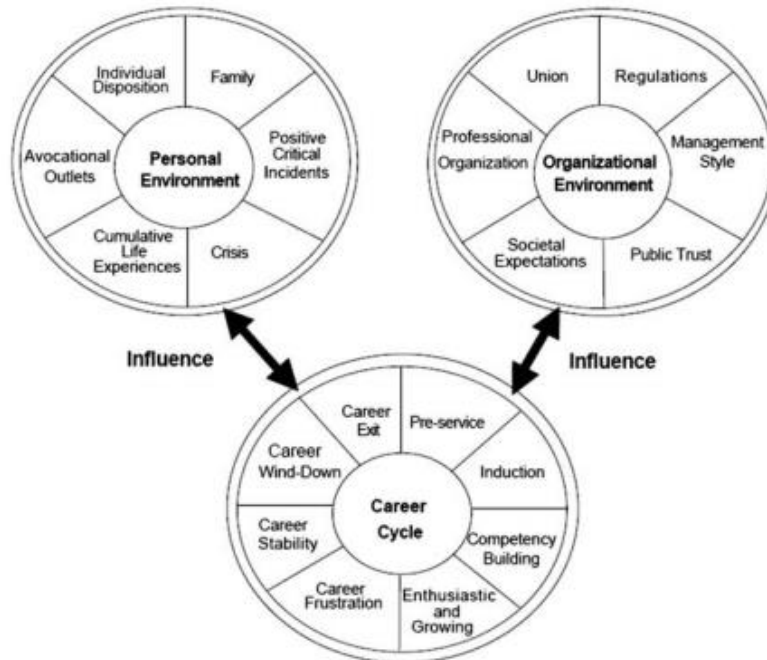
Fessler and Christensen (1992) authored the *Teacher Career Cycle* (Figure 2.1) that defines eight stages of the teaching career. Most applicable to this study is the induction stage located between pre-service and competency building. Fessler and Christensen (1992) describe the induction stage as one 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 the teachers attitudes change, but little about the factors that contribute to the changes. Greiman et al. (2005) used the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* (Fessler and Christensen, 1992) as the foundation for their study on the organizational environment’s impact on induction teachers. They found teachers were not prepared for the isolation and socialization challenges within the complex program management environment of agricultural education and were provided less support than they wanted and needed by administration.

**Figure 2.1**

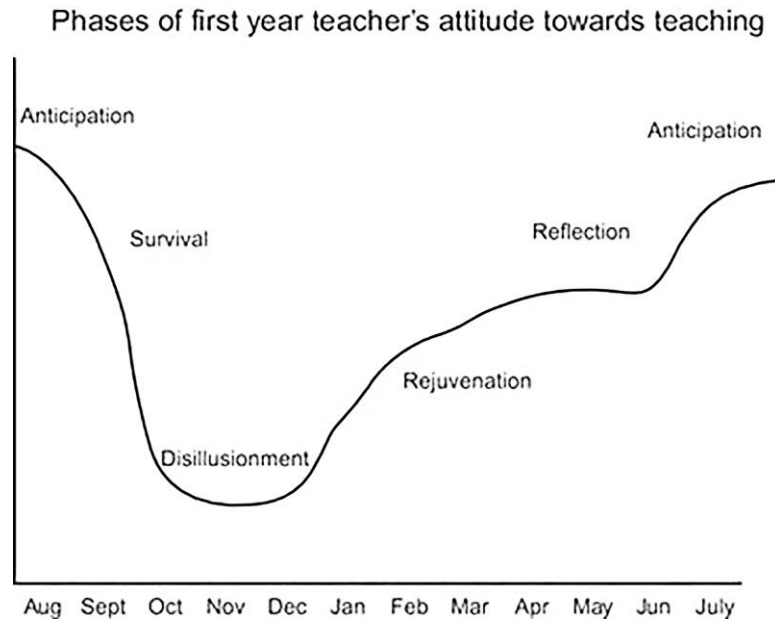
*Teacher career cycle model (Fessler & Christensen, 1992)*



Ellen Moir (1999) explained the first year of teaching as “a roller coaster of events” in her model (See Figure 2.2), she identified five stages that beginning teachers experience throughout their first year: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection and then a return to anticipation. Moir suggested factors that influence this roller coaster of feelings toward teaching include excitement for the career, overwhelming expectations of parents and administration, long hours, personal health, school breaks and the promise of a new year (Moir, 1999). Education is one of the few professions in which professionals early in their career are held to the same standards and expectations as their seasoned peers (Mundt, 1991). However, Moir’s model is limited in scope to the first-year teaching experience which leaves the question how do the second- and third-year teachers compare? Furthermore, are there factors of an agriculture teacher’s career that would shift their attitude toward teaching during different times of the academic year than Moir research presents? Shoulder’s (2018) work on professional identity shows agriculture teachers uniquely identify themselves as agriculturalists over educational professionals which could be a contributing factor to the teachers possessing a different experience than Moir presents.

**Figure 2.2**

*Phases of First-Year Teacher Attitudes Toward Teaching (Moir, 1999)*

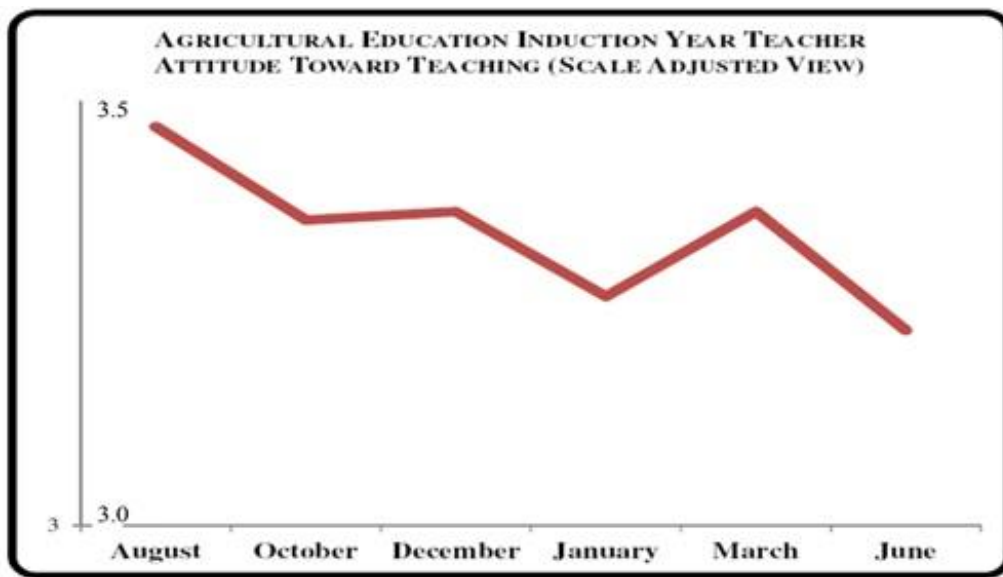


Mundt (1991) conducted a qualitative study on agriculture teachers and concluded that a general lack of self-confidence caused the stress and overwhelmed feelings of the first-year teachers he studied. Although much of the research on beginning teachers, and beginning agriculture teachers, highlights challenging themes and the general feeling of being overwhelmed through their early years this is not always the case. Talbert's qualitative study on beginning agriculture teachers cited that not all novice teacher's experiences are bad, and teachers are encouraged by positive feedback from students and others which propels them forward (Talbert, 1994). In Talbert's (1994) study the teachers identified student discipline, unique requirements of the agricultural education profession, isolation, time management, lesson planning, classroom/laboratory management and students as common themes in the first-year agriculture teachers' experiences. Similarly, Rayfield et al. (2014) found induction year teachers held a generally positive attitude toward their career, but the highs and lows were significant and consistent with Moir's (1999) findings (see Figure 2.3). This study was also limited in scope by

only looking at first year teachers. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of the study did not provide examples of what caused the attitudinal shifts during the academic year. Although themes exist, major challenges faced by beginning teachers vary greatly among the teachers and may be a result of their unique culture of the school and community in which they teach (Myers et al., 2005).

**Figure 2.3**

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

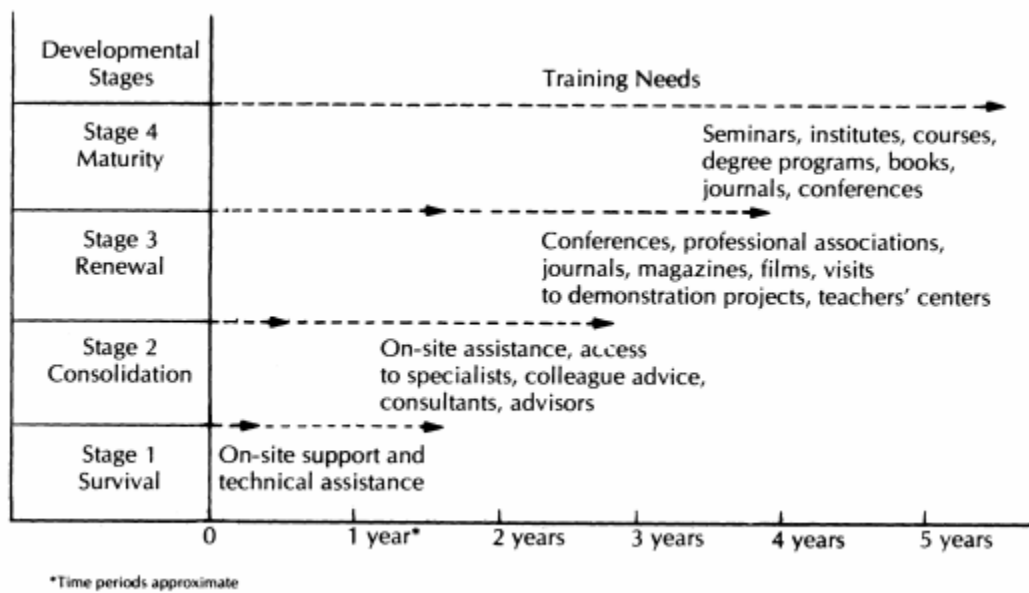


Katz (1972) identified the stages of development of teachers (Figure 2.4). Her research focused on pre-school teachers and matched those stages with recommendations for professional development. In the initial “survival” stage, she recommended on-site support bringing the resources to the teacher. Over time, the teachers were found to reach out to mentors for individual consultation and later engage with professional development that allows the teachers

to focus on the growth areas they have identified for themselves. When compared to the other models, Katz (1972) presented a longitudinal approach looking at teachers needs over the first five years of their career but was limited in scope by only looking at pre-school teachers' experiences.

**Figure 2.4**

*Typical novice teacher professional development experience through Katz's (1972) stages of development in novice teachers*



The culture of the teaching profession plays a role in the induction teachers experiences. Hasselquist et al. (2017) identified school culture as a significant contributor to a teacher's feeling of belonging in the school. This is similar to Clemons (2019) who identified the support of former teachers within the agricultural education career field had a significant impact on teacher longevity and career satisfaction. While the Clemons (2019) study focused on teachers who stayed in the profession, Langley et al. (2014) identified why experienced teachers left the profession and found establishing themselves in a new community and experiencing cultural shock impacted their self-efficacy.

## **Program Management (FFA, SAE & Classroom)**

Many veteran teachers are challenged to provide a balanced agricultural education program including classroom/laboratory, FFA and SAE. Therefore, it is not a surprise that our novice teachers also struggle delivering a balanced program early in their career. Myers et al. (2005) found “organizing and planning FFA chapter events and activities” (Myers et al., 2005, p. 53) was in the top five problems rated by beginning teachers. When it comes to time, agriculture teachers of all experience levels spent a majority of their time planning and executing instruction (Torres et al., 2008). Specifically, for beginning teachers they spent 46% of their time teaching, 16% preparing for instruction, and 7% on laboratory preparation/maintenance and 7% on CDE preparation (Torres et al., 2008). If time represents teachers’ priorities, teachers in this study showed us their priority is the classroom, followed by FFA and then SAE. Wolf (2011) suggested beginning agriculture teachers were the most efficacious in classroom followed by FFA and the least in SAE. This further showed SAE is the most challenging agricultural education program component for beginning teachers to execute because they feel the least efficacious in that role and therefore spend the least amount of their time supporting SAE development in students.

## **Student Relationships, Management, Motivation and Learning**

Teachers spend a majority of their time working with students; therefore, establishing positive relationships with students is foundational for success in the profession. When student relationships are built on a foundation of mutual respect, it leads to fewer student management challenges and a higher motivation to learn in the classroom (Wentzel & Miele, 2009). When principals were asked to identify their perceived causes of teacher ineffectiveness, both

classroom management and rapport with students were the most significant factors (Torff & Sessions, 2005).

Furthermore, Tait (2008) stated “teachers must form trusting and functional relationships with students.” Specifically, in agricultural education, research conducted by Boone and Boone (2007) cited that student-centered agriculture teachers showed a higher retention rate in the profession. Decreasing the transition of teachers moving between programs further aids in student relationship development as high-quality teacher/student relationships develop over time. Also, in the top five problems encountered by beginning teachers in the research by Myers et al. (2005) was “management of student discipline in the classroom.” In fact, it was the most commonly identified problem the respondents shared.

Student motivation can be established using intrinsic and extrinsic means. Ball (2016) found those teachers who were most successful at student motivation could shift between the use of both extrinsic and intrinsic based on the students and used both coaching and learning strategies to develop students content knowledge. Teachers who were purposeful in developing student relationships and motivating students were found to have fewer student management challenges and increased learning in their classes (Ball, 2016).

### **Curriculum and Planning**

Perhaps one factor of the overwhelmed feeling of beginning teachers hinges on curriculum and planning. Moir (1990) stated, “They become very focused and consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching...particularly overwhelming is the constant need to develop curriculum” (p. 1). Ball and Feiman-Nemser (2014) found teachers felt the need to create their own lessons in order to be effective teachers, which required significant time and further contributed to time management challenges of early career teachers.

The pressure of planning was also a factor for agriculture teachers in research conducted by Whittington et al. (2006) who identified the factors in teacher self-efficacy. The number of course preparations teachers had was determined to be a major factor in their feeling of self-efficacy with more preparations decreasing their self-efficacy of teaching. In a study that sought to understand how time is spent planning for intern and novice teachers Ball et al. (2007) found beginning teachers averaged 10 hours of planning per week.

Resources needed for curriculum and planning vary based on the years of experience a teacher has. Beginning teachers have different needs related to curriculum content and delivery. For example, Figland et al. (2019) researched the specific needs of agriculture teachers based on their years of experience and found there was a significant difference in needs based on years of teaching experience. Teachers with one to five years of experience desired experience related to laboratory management resources. Washburn et al. (2001) also looked at professional development needs by year of experience and found beginning teachers had a greater desire to learn about technical agriculture.

### **Time Management**

The National New Teacher Study: Beginning Teachers' Concerns by Meister and Melnick (2003) found "84% of teachers indicated they are sometimes overwhelmed by time constraints and workload" (p. 89). Time is a challenge for many early career professionals, however, in teaching we ask the novice teacher to deliver the same product we expect from the experienced teacher, causing an even more significant time commitment to the job early in their career. Lambert et al. (2011) researched how early career agriculture teachers talk about their time. The researchers found teachers struggled with time management but, accepted it as part of the job. They simply hoped it would get better in the future. The study suggested there is a



difference between how teachers would like to spend their time and how they actually spend their time. It may be hard to differentiate time on the job when social time is woven within the job. The teachers in the Lambert study acknowledged that time demands change with the time of year, but they consistently work greater than 40 hours per week.

### **Work/Life Balance**

“Work-family conflict or interference, work-family accommodation, work-family compensation, work-family segmentation, work family enrichment, work-family expansion” (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p.1) and the most widely used term, work/life balance all insinuate individuals have multiple roles in their lives and there is a desire to find a comfortable balance between them. The time required to do a high-quality job as a beginning teacher contributes to the greater challenge of work/life balance. “I thought there would be more time to get everything done. It’s like working three jobs 7:30-2:30, 2:30-6:00, with more time spent in the evening and on weekends” was how one teacher described their time (Moir, 1999, p. 1).

When looking at agriculture teachers, Sorensen and McKim (2014) found teachers had a moderate ability to achieve work/life balance. However, this study included teachers of all experience levels. When looking at beginning agriculture teachers, Lambert et al. (2011) found they spent significant time working, but the teachers determined when and where they would and would not work. For example, some teachers made the decision to not take work home but, may work at least part of all seven days of the week while others made the decision to work at home. It is evident that managing any type of balance between work and life is a hurdle for beginning teachers. Solomonson et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to learn why agriculture teachers had left the profession and a strong theme was “being an excellent agriculture teacher is incompatible with a personal life” (p.126). It is critical teachers are supported in making

professional decisions that are compatible with their personal life to retain them in the profession.

### **School Culture**

The challenges faced by beginning teachers as they work to integrate into the school culture have been documented and show little change over the past 35 years (Cherubini, 2009). In many schools, there are unwritten norms, policies and expectations beginning teachers are expected to adhere to but may not be educated about. Back-to-School night, parent/teacher conferences, faculty relationships and administrative support play a role in the early experiences beginning teachers have in which they learn about the school culture (Moir, 1990). Walker et al. (2004) found in the measures of job satisfaction, dealing with administration, keeping student records and grades, and school-wide supervision duties all received a mean level of dislike and all were directly related to school culture. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2016) show that for teachers who left the profession, 55% contributed that decision to the challenging working conditions related to school culture.

### **Community Culture**

Gordon (1991) contributed the assimilation into a new community as part of the shock beginning teachers experience. He suggested that induction programs help the teachers understand the school and community. Most communities have a limited number of agriculture teaching positions; therefore, it is very common for recent graduates to move into a new community upon graduation (Langley, 2014). This transition can have a major impact on job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the choice to remain in the agriculture teaching profession. Langley et al. (2014) studied community connectedness related to novice agriculture teachers and found the “culture shock” of moving to a new community has a significant influence on their

self-efficacy in addition the cultural distance of their new community had an effect on their general well-being.

### **Administration and Faculty Relationships**

For all teachers, the actions by leaders set the environment within the school and the school environment resulted in a significant impact on teacher satisfaction and commitment. (Anderman, 1991). Sutchter et al. (2016) found administration support was very important to teachers and a significant factor contributing to the decision of teachers to leave the profession. Many beginning teachers feel as if their lives are encompassed by their job, so it is no surprise that their relationships with faculty and administration in the school can have a significant impact on their attitudes towards their careers. Hasselquist et al. (2017) found relationships within a school district are “significant influencers of beginning agriculture teachers’ job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy” (p. 275). When researching the planning processes of beginning teachers, Ball et al. (2007) found the expectations turning in lesson plans for accountability was daunting to the teachers, but they acknowledge the accountability to the planning process had positive impacts on their teaching. Therefore, administrator support for beginning teachers goes beyond the relationships. The expectations that administrators lay out, if clear and connected to quality teaching, can have a lasting positive impact. Gordon (1991) identified unclear expectations and inadequate resources as challenges faced by beginning teachers, both of which can be addresses by developing a positive working relationship with administration

### **Additional Responsibilities**

Role conflict and work overload were determinants for teacher burnout, both of which are increased when teachers take on additional roles in the school system (Byrne, 1994). Teachers are asked to do a lot within school systems including social emotional care, bullying education,

special education support, club and class sponsorships, athletic coaching, the list of additional responsibilities we ask of our teachers goes on and on and especially impacts beginning teachers. These responsibilities are in addition to their “full time” jobs teaching. Smalley and Rank (2019) examined the perception of what being an agriculture teacher was like through the eyes of early field experience students. The students described additional responsibilities as having a negative impact on the teachers’ work-life balance. Similarly, Thieman et al. (2014) found by only highlighting highly successful agriculture programs and experienced professionals to pre-service teachers it set unrealistic expectations for them later as novice teachers.

### **Isolation**

As members of a profession that is based on relationship building and working with people, the thought of feeling “isolated” within the profession may seem ironic. Social isolation is commonly experienced by new teachers. To help alleviate these challenges, administrators and faculty can purposely engage in casual and formal conversations with beginning teachers to help socialize them into the school and community (Gordon, 1991). The feeling of isolation is especially challenging for beginning agriculture teachers as they are commonly the only agriculture teachers in the building or district. Agriculture teachers are largely isolated from the other professionals in the building most of the day due to the physical location of their classroom and/or having separate lunch or planning periods. (Flinders, 1988) and Mundt (1991) discussed the feeling of isolation specifically in beginning teachers. Talbert et al. (1994) described agriculture teachers feeling of isolation based on location, in the qualitative study they learned one teacher was located in a separate building and the other in a separate end of the building. This caused “minimal contact with other teachers” (Talbert, 1994, p. 34). De Lay and Washburn

(2013) proposed teacher collaboration within agricultural education could help teachers stay in the profession and help combat the feeling of isolation.

### **Professional Development**

Similar to Katz's 1972 findings, teachers in other studies also possess different professional development needs based on their experience. Figland et al. (2019) looked at the professional development needs of Louisiana agriculture teachers and discovered they desired more experience in online teaching, however, teachers with 1-5 years of experience sought out 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 focusing on content directly related to topics they taught. However, professional development that was delivered via active and engaging learning methods were 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.

### **Mentoring**

What is mentoring and how is it different than coaching or advising? Hastings and Kane (2018) discuss mentoring being a "process, not an event" (p. 10). Furthermore, mentoring is long term and although the purpose is to grow the mentee, there are benefits to both parties if they invest in the long-term relationship. In contrast, Hastings, and Kane (2018) describe coaching as shorter term and focused on behavior development. Finally, advising can happen in a variety of

settings and is dictated by the needs of the organization or individual. While novice teachers can benefit from advising, coaching, and mentoring, one foundational difference is that developing a relationship between the mentor and mentee is more significant in mentoring than the other roles (Hastings & Kane, 2018).

It is not fair to expect every individual to possess an innate sense of mentoring without training. Pfund et al. (2006) encouraged programs to conduct mentor trainings because good mentoring can be learned and more effective if mentors have been provided tools and a mentoring mindset. Mentor training includes communication methods, addressing differing expectations, skill proficiency and thinking about the mindset of the mentee. Pfund (2006) found mentors who completed the training were more likely to discuss expectations, provide an orientation, discuss issues of diversity, and seek clarification about the mentee's mentoring needs.

High quality mentoring takes skill and time. Darling-Hammond (2017) found schools who provide mentors time in their contractual day to work with beginning teachers were able to be more effective because they have the time for the additional meetings, observations, and skill coaching. Providing skills and time to mentors contributes to a higher quality experience for both individuals.

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 (2016) looked that the support provided to beginning agriculture teachers by mentors. They found a variance in support

provided by mentors; it was not impacted by the amount of interaction time spent with each other but rather the quality of the relationship. Burriss et al. (2006) looked at the matching of mentors with beginning teachers, guided by the Mentoring Relationship Questionnaire developed by Greiman (2002). They found that when beginning teachers and mentors had similar dyad partners there was an increased satisfaction in the mentoring experience. When reflecting on these studies, it appears it is not length of interaction that creates a high-quality mentoring experience but rather being able to build on similarities and developing a true relationship that established successful mentoring relationships. Lamm et al. (2020) found mentoring relationships that were less formal were more productive when there was a prior relationship between the pair. Tummons et al. (2016) found the best predictor of mentor support was when the mentee felt similarities with the mentor. These studies identified prior relationships, quality relationships, mentor training, and mentor support as factors that led to a stronger mentoring experience for novice teachers. Furthermore, they show creating high quality mentor/mentee matches is in fact a science and should be done systematically, not randomly.

The importance of having the right person as a mentor may be what causes informal mentoring to be just as, or more effective as formal mentoring programs. Inzer and Crawford (2005) found formal mentoring was less effective than informal mentoring. They go on to say that formal mentoring programs should not be removed if there is structure and good mentors, but there is a place for both formal and informal mentoring in an organization.

## **Programming**

Mentoring is a component of an induction teacher program, however, mentoring alone is not enough. Other components that can be provided include one-on-one meetings with supervisors, more frequent classroom visits, professional development on induction teacher

support, shared planning times and reduced teaching loads to allow time for the higher needs of planning and professional development of beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017)

Moore and Swan (2008) categorized induction teacher activities as high intensity and low intensity. High intensity activities included networking, on-sites visits, mentoring, college credit and group sessions. The low intensity activities included orientation, collaboration, and less formal mentoring. This shows a program that both increases teacher effectiveness and teacher retention needs to be multi-faceted and comprehensive rather than a one-time meeting.

Novice teacher activities can increase the sense of belonging in the profession and spark collaboration. DeLay and Washburn (2013) found when discussing with mid-career teachers, collaboration as an early career teacher was one way teachers worked to overcome the feeling of needing to learn everything all at once when they were beginning. Collaborations could include lesson development and exchange of tools used in managing FFA and SAE programs.

### **Summary of Previous Research and Relationship to Study**

A review of the current research identified themes related to both the beginning teacher and specifically beginning agriculture teacher experiences. Quantitative research on beginning teachers and agriculture teachers in their first year was vast. Qualitative studies on beginning teachers in the induction year were present. A gap in the literature exists for qualitative research focusing on beginning agriculture teachers exists - especially in longitudinal studies that following beginning teachers through multiple years.



## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **Purpose**

Qualitative research seeks to learn how meaning is made from experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). A longitudinal qualitative study allowed the researcher to see how meaning is made and may change over time through a variety of experiences. This longitudinal qualitative study worked to understand the phenomenon of the beginning agriculture teacher by following teachers through their first three years of teaching. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed for understanding of how teachers' experiences and attitudes changed over time. Thus, leading to rich descriptions of their individual and collective experiences describing their "processes, relationships, settings, and situations, systems and people" (Peshkin, 1993, p.23).

A qualitative study design was selected to gain richer information related to beginning teachers' experiences. Beginning teachers are already struggling to balance their time as a teacher (Moir, 1999) therefore, quantitative collection methods may not be successful. Phenomenological case study design was selected to learn about the experiences of beginning agriculture teachers within a set bounded system, over time, including in-depth data collection using multiple sources (Creswell, 2018).

Throughout the Phenomenological Case Study, methods were used to develop rigorous, worthy research through reflexivity and triangulation (Tracy, 2010). Rigor was established through a carefully selected group of teachers who are part of the established bounded system. The longitudinal nature of the three-year study allows for in-depth understanding of the teacher's experiences and how they evolved and changed over time. Reflexivity was established throughout the study by researcher journaling during interviews and focus groups and researcher memos documenting thoughts during data analysis. Triangulation was established by comparing

the multiple data sources; interviews, photographs, classroom observations, focus groups and end of the year reflections

## **Methodological Framework**

### **Epistemological Perspective**

The goal of qualitative research is to conduct, deep, rich conversations with a set group of participants so that “everything is perceived freshly, as for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34) when engaging in interviews and data collection with the researcher. When conducting research, epistemology must be considered; how do we know what we know? In this qualitative study, constructionism guided the research. Constructionism states that “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 2015, p. 9) in the individual mind and is influenced by our culture. Constructionism lays the groundwork for research that builds new meaning based on learning the lived experiences of others. Constructionism should not be confused with constructivism, although many times they are used “interchangeably” (Crotty, 2015, p. 217). The “generation and transmission of meaning” (Crotty, 2015, p. 58) through each individual’s unique experience is the basis of constructivism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within Constructionism, the research is led by the theoretical perspective of interpretivism through phenomenology. Interpretivism allows the researcher to interpret the experiences and interactions of the participants to develop meaning and understanding. Phenomenology was selected to learn about the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenology guided the research as “a starting point and a basis” (Crotty, 2015, p.79). This is fitting since the longitudinal nature of the study follows the participants at the beginning of their teaching journey and offers touchpoints throughout the three years of the research monthly.

Seeking the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017) meets the purpose of this study. Pragmatism influences the research as well, allowing for the use of multiple methods of data collection and consideration of the practical implications of the research, (Creswell, 2018).

Moir's (1999) work shows the needs of beginning teachers are dynamic and complex, therefore a qualitative study is better suited to understand their unique experiences.

Constructionism guides the research that is seeking to understand the lived experiences of beginning teachers. Interpretivism through Phenomenology provides an anchor (Crotty, 2009) for the research as all participants are experiencing the unique phenomenon of their first years as a teacher.

## **Methodology**

The phenomenological case study design focused on the phenomenon of being a beginning agriculture teacher and allowed for "using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" which compliments the longitudinal study (Crotty, 2009 p. 14). Case study research influences what is studied by establishing a bounded system specifically defining the setting of the research based on time and place (Creswell, 2018). Utilizing collective case study design, the focus is on the phenomenon and utilizes multiple cases to describe the experience. When selecting multiple cases in a collective form it provides the ability to show different perspectives of the phenomenon participants experience (Merriam, 2018). Within the case study design there are clear procedures to follow including purposeful sampling, holistic and embedded analysis, identification of themes based on the context gained by looking at specific cases followed by cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2018). Constructivist Grounded Theory positions the researcher within the study (rather than outside viewing in) by the creation of a

subjectivity statement that outlines prior experiences and relationships with the participants and guides the role of the research in the collection and analysis of the data (Bhattacharya, 2017).

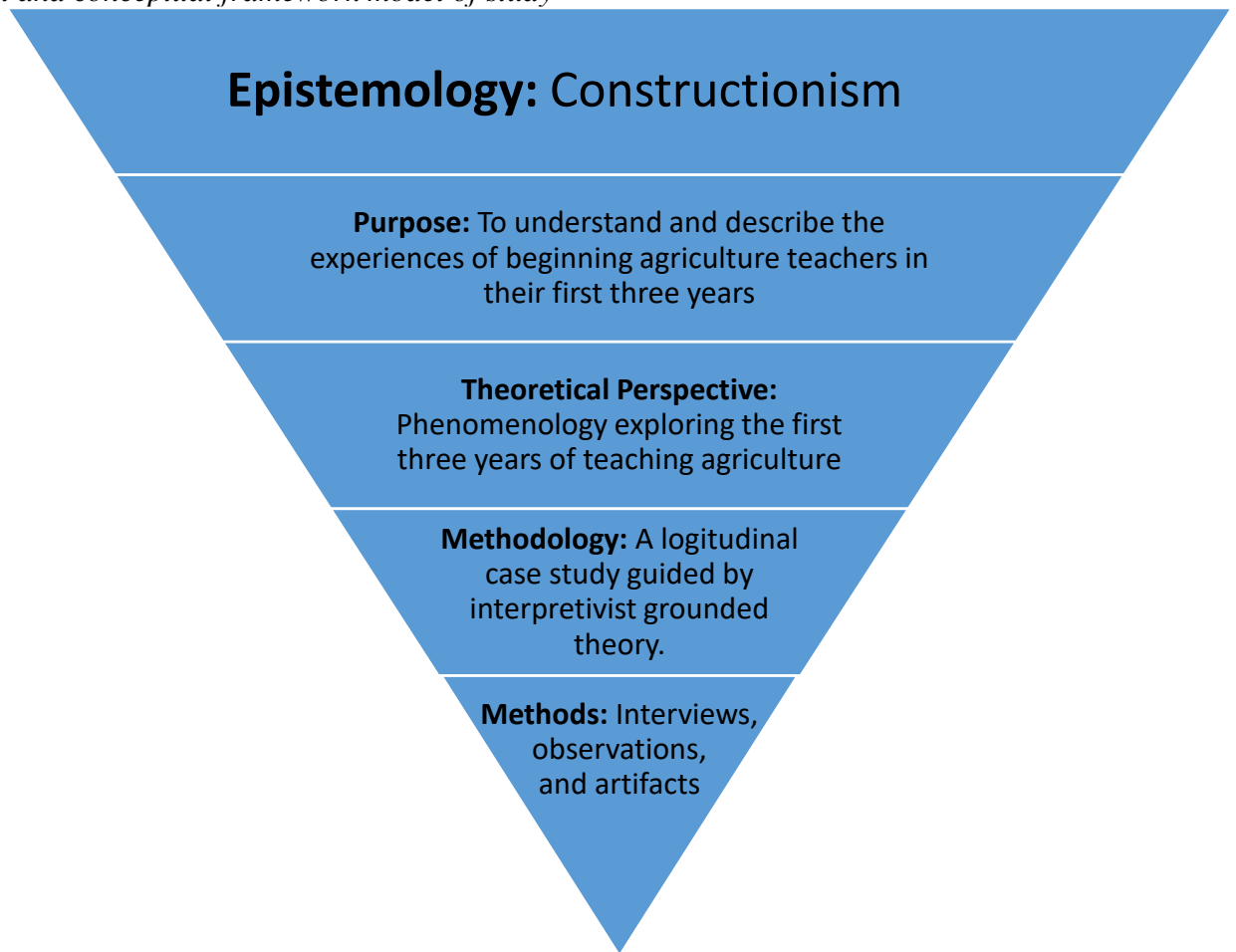
Fessler and Christensen designed the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* that included eight stages teachers move through during their career: preservice, induction, competency building, enthusiastic and growing, career frustration, career stability, career wind-down and career exit. Most pertinent to this study is the induction stage of the model that focused on the first few years of employment and discussed how the teachers are socialized into the school environment (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). During this stage, the teachers are seeking acceptance by everyone around them, administration, faculty and students. The teachers are generally unsure of their own ability to effectively teach but are treated just like their veteran peers which caused the teachers to enter survival mode when they focus on day to day decisions rather than long term planning. This survival mode naturally caused the teachers to question their career and wonder if it gets better (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). Once the teachers break through the survival mode, they are able to think about teaching strategies and learner outcomes.

To accomplish these research goals, I am methodologically guided to conduct case studies, phenomenological, and grounded theory research. These methods allow me to develop a deeper understanding of a group of participants. As a researcher I work with participants who have experienced a phenomenon within a bounded system by gathering information through multiple data sources over a period of time on a worthy topic. I am fully engaged in the research process by outlining my subjectivities, conducting reflexivity exercises including journaling and writing memos during data analysis. Triangulation is established by comparing multiple sources of data. Analysis is led by a constructivist grounded theory lens where the results emerge from the data, being aware to not “look” for something but “learn” from their experiences. During

analysis, the researcher provides insight in the data analysis process by a review of field journals and creating memos as data is coded. Validity and reliability are established through peer review of the methodologies and throughout the data analysis process. Based on these principles, the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study was created to guide research decisions while conducting the study (See Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1**

*Theoretical and conceptual framework model of study*



To grow and develop as a researcher, I have a desire to develop my skills in participatory and pragmatic theories with the goal of developing “communities of inquiry embedded in communities of practice” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196). As a novice researcher, there are times I am too rigid when conducting interviews and interacting with participants and need to

gain the confidence to step back as a researcher to develop a participatory design where the participants lead the study. Worthy research is practical and applicable to the practitioner in the field (Tracy, 2010).

## **Research Design**

### **Participants**

An instrumental case study design was used and therefore one bounded system was established (Creswell, 2018). The bounded system (Creswell, 2018) was created by all participants being agricultural education graduates from Kansas State University in the mid 2010 decade who chose to teach agriculture in Kansas upon graduation. Due to the small sample size, which is the case in many phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2018) graduates meeting the criteria of the bounded system were invited to participate in the study through an e-mail invitation. Eight teachers responded positively to the invitation and a visit to their school was scheduled during the first 4-6 weeks of school. All participants completed consent forms approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participant demographics changed over the three-year study. In year one, there were eight participants, seven females and one male. All participants were white and ranged in ages from 22-25 years old during their first year of teaching. Six teachers were in programs where they were the only agriculture teacher, two teachers were in multi-teacher programs. One participant returned to their hometown to teach. One participant did not have high school agricultural education experience. During their first-year teaching one teacher was married and two had a child. In year two of the study there were seven teachers, of which one was male. Five teachers were the only ag teacher in their school and two were in multi teacher programs. Two participants changed positions between years one and two, one moved from a single teacher

program to a multi-teacher program and one moved from a two-teacher program to a single teacher program. One participant left the study after year one due to time demands but remained teaching agriculture. Two teachers were married and two each had a child. In year three, there were six teachers, all female. One participant left the study and the teaching profession after year two to engage in production agriculture. Of the six teachers, two were teaching in multi-teacher programs and the rest were the only agriculture teacher in their school. Two participants were married, and one had a child. One participant moved between years two and three to return to their home program. At the conclusion of the three-year study, seven of the eight original participants entered their fourth-year teaching agriculture. Although providing individual demographics of the participants would be valuable to the story, specific details are presented collectively instead of independently to protect their individual identities, general details about each participant are summarized in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Demographics of Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age at beginning of study</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Clare	Female	22	white
Claudia	Female	22	white
Crystal	Female	23	white
Hank	Male	24	white
Helen	Female	23	white
Paige	Female	23	white
Sophia	Female	25	white
Wendy	Female	23	white

**Sites of Research**

The teachers taught in eleven different communities throughout the three-year study. This included the eight communities I which they started their teaching careers, and the three communities' individuals moved to after their first-year teaching. The schools were in

communities spread across the state of Kansas. Utilizing the United States Department of Agriculture (2019) definitions, two communities were greater than 2,500 in population and would be considered “urban clusters” while the other nine communities meet the definition of rural with populations less than 2,500 (para. 2). The community populations ranged from 414 to 3,983 (United States Census Bureau, 2020). All the communities were predominately white populations.

Utilizing the Kansas State High School Activities Association classifications, five schools were classified as 1A with high school enrollments 14-108 students; four schools were classified as 2A with high school enrollments between 109-171 students; and two schools were classified as 4A with high school enrollments ranging between 312-661 students. All schools had predominately white populations.

### **Researcher Role**

Following the constructivist grounded theory method, the researchers enters the study with the influences of their individual experiences, beliefs, and assumptions (Bhattacharya, 2017). This experience is used as a tool to help make meaning within the research. Potential bias was addressed by the creation of a subjectivity statement that identified the researcher’s background relationships with the study participants. It is important to identify the background of the researcher and experiences related to the content of the study and the participants. The subjectivity of the research is addressed below.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

I am currently an Instructor of Agricultural Education at Kansas State University and have been for the last nine years. I teach three courses related to preparing future agriculture teachers, however, I have taught nearly every course in the agricultural education program at some point. I



also advise agricultural education undergraduate students and work closely with the Agricultural Education Club. Therefore, I taught most of the pre-service course work and served as an academic advisor for the participants in this study. Prior to working at Kansas State University, I was a high school agriculture teacher at Southeast of Saline High School for ten years where I was the only agriculture teacher in the school and taught all agriculture content including Agriscience, Horticulture, Agricultural Mechanics and Agribusiness. I can clearly remember the experiences I had in my first few years of teaching and have fond memories of my time in the classroom and working with FFA members. While I was teaching, I also provided service to the profession by facilitating the novice agriculture teacher program for the Kansas Association of Agricultural Educators from 2003-2016. I graduated from Kansas State University in 2001 and was hired as the first agriculture teacher and asked to establish the agriculture program at Southeast of Saline High School. While in college I was active in numerous clubs and organizations and met some of my closest friends who are now colleagues in education. In 1997 I graduated from Lawrence High School, which was at the time, the largest high school in Kansas and a “non-typical” agricultural education program. My interest in agricultural education stemmed from my mom who was a county extension agent and my dad who was involved in production agriculture.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Following the protocol for conducting interviews by Creswell (2018), creating research questions for the study was the first step of data collection. Since “conducting a phenomenological study involves primarily in-depth interviews” (Creswell, 2018) questions were carefully crafted to learn about the phenomenon through the eyes of these individuals. Questions were written to learn about their attitudes toward teaching, their perceived successes, and challenges. Based on information gained through the literature review, specific questions

about curriculum and planning, work/life balance, school and community culture were created (Boone & Boone, 2007; Myers et. al., 2005). In addition, the literature emphasized the role of mentors in successful teachers therefore a question on mentors was added. After the questions were reviewed by an agricultural education professor, IRB protocol and informed consent were written and submitted. IRB approval was secured and a pilot interview testing the protocol was conducted. Guided by the case study design, multiple data forms were gathered alongside the interviews (Creswell, 2018) including site tours, photographs, informal introductions with administrators, observations of participants teaching and finally focus groups

The visit and interview protocol were piloted with a second-year agriculture teacher who was not engaged with the study. Adjustments were made to the protocol following a debriefing session with the pilot teacher.

It is important to note that rapport (Creswell, 2018) was already established between the researcher and the teachers based on previous experience before the data collection process was initiated. *Individual visits* were conducted at the beginning of their first year between the 4th and 6th weeks of the novice teachers' school calendar. This half-day visit included a tour of the facilities, a class observation, meeting an administrator of the teacher's choice and a one-hour interview conducted in the teacher's classroom. Creswell (2018) emphasizes the need for multiple sources of information to be collected, therefore photographs documented the facilities, a scripting method of classroom observation was used during the teacher observation, the meeting with the administrators were informal and documented in field notes and the interview was recorded for later transcription. To increase the comfort level of the teacher and within the parameters of the study, the teacher selected the day of the visit, the class that was observed and the administrator that was introduced. Each visit was 3-4 hours long. The researcher gathered

extensive field notes during the visit and scripted the observed lesson. The visit concluded with the first semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) interview in person following the interview protocol (Appendix D).

Following the visit, *monthly semi-structured interview phone conversations* were conducted guided by the interview protocol (Appendix D), the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Phone interviews were selected because they maintain the one-on-one interaction but were less costly and time consuming than in-person interviews considering the significant distance between the interviewer and the teachers and the frequency of the monthly interviews within the three-year duration. On average the interviews lasted about 30 minutes. The same interview protocol and questions were used throughout the study. The intention of the interview was to learn about the phenomenon participants were experiencing as a beginning teacher through their point of view (Creswell, 2018). The interview began with an open-ended question “what is going on in your life?” prior to engaging with the interview questions to invite the participant to “open up” (Creswell, 2018, p. 164). The next question asked them to “describe your feelings toward teaching in one word” followed by a series of questions asking them to reflect back on the last month regarding their accomplishments and strengths and then to look forward to the month ahead and consider what they were looking forward to and concerned about. Finally, a series of questions asking about specific roles of the agriculture teachers and their personal life followed. The final question was always about setting up the next time to talk. A reflection journal was used by the researcher during and following each interview. Reflexivity was exercised throughout the interview process to make the researcher aware of their thoughts (Creswell, 2018).

*Virtual focus groups* were held at the end of each of the school years. Prior to the virtual meeting, participants were asked to document the highs and lows of their year and respond to written questions in a reflection journal (Appendix E). The participant-completed reflection journals were referred to during the focus group and provided to the researcher. The focus group was guided by the focus group protocol (Appendix D), recorded and transcribed. The focus group provided triangulation to the study and encouraged the teachers to interact with each other while reflecting on the year.

During year two of the study, seven of the eight participants continued the study (one continued to teach agriculture but withdrew from the study). Two of the teachers had moved schools so another site visit was conducted for the two who were in a new position following the same protocol for year 1 site visits. Monthly phone interviews resumed during the first week of school. They were conducted for approximately 30 minutes each. The researcher took journal notes during and following the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Another focus group meeting was held at the conclusion of the year following the same protocol as year one with questions modified based on their experiences.

During year three of the study, six of the seven participants continued the study (one left the teaching profession). One of the teachers had moved schools so another site visit was conducted for that teacher using the protocol established for sites visits during years one and two. Monthly phone interviews resumed during the first week of school and were again conducted monthly for approximately 30 minutes, were recorded and then later transcribed. A final focus group meeting was held at the conclusion of the year following the same protocol as year 1 & 2 with some questions modified based on their experiences. The data collection timeline and tasks are summarized in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2***Data Collection Timeline and Tasks*

<b>Time</b>	<b>Task</b>
Year 1 August	Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for study (Appendix A)
	Identify and correspond with 1 <sup>st</sup> year agriculture teachers of the K-State Agricultural Education Program and invited them to be involved (Appendix B)
September-mid-October, Year 1	Between the teacher's 30 <sup>th</sup> and 45 <sup>th</sup> day of school, each received a site visit that included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Option to consent (Appendix C)</li> <li>- Meeting with administration</li> <li>- Observation of teaching</li> <li>- Tour &amp; photographs of facilities</li> <li>- One-on-one interview following monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)</li> </ul>
October-May	Monthly phone interviews with individuals were conducted every 4 weeks for each teacher following the monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)
	Reflexive journaling, transcription and data analysis of interviews were conducted
August	Year one focus group utilizing the moderator guides (Appendix E)
	Participants completed individual reflection guides (Appendix F) and provided them to the researcher
Year 2 August- May	Phone interviews were conducted with each individual during the first week of their school year following the monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)
	Reflexive journaling, transcription and data analysis of interviews were conducted
October	Between the teacher's 30 <sup>th</sup> and 45 <sup>th</sup> day of school, each teacher who changed schools received a site visit that included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting with administration</li> <li>- Observation of teaching</li> <li>- Tour &amp; photographs of facilities</li> </ul> One-on-one interview following monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)
June	Year two focus group guided by the focus group moderator guide (Appendix E)

Year 3	August- May	Phone interviews were conducted with each teacher during the first week of their school year following the monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)
		Reflexive journaling, transcription and data analysis of interviews were conducted
	October	Between the teacher's 30 <sup>th</sup> and 45 <sup>th</sup> day of school, each teacher who changed schools received a site visit that included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meeting with administration</li> <li>- Observation of teaching</li> <li>- Tour &amp; photographs of facilities</li> </ul> One-on-one interview following monthly interview protocol (Appendix D)
	June	Year three focus group guided by the focus group moderator guide (Appendix E)

## Data Management

### Ethical Considerations

Initial interviews were conducted on site and the remaining interviews were by phone. A handheld audio recording device was used to record the interviews and was aided by an ear placed microphone for the recording of phone conversations. Due to the volume of transcripts (132 interviews), a reliable transcription service was utilized. Once transcribed, the interviews were up-loaded into the NVivo 12 program for coding. Back-up copies of the audio files and the transcription files were saved on University provided, password protected computer and cloud storage for security. Data transcription and coding were done with the anonymity of the participants using pseudonyms (Creswell, 2018). Actual names of the participants were not attached to transcripts, analysis or reporting of data. Details about the participant profiles were presented in a composite profile to ensure continued anonymity (Creswell, 2018).

### Rigor and Trustworthiness

Practices of quality qualitative research were established and documented to address rigor and trustworthiness. Rigor was established by selecting participants who were part of an

established bounded system (Tracy, 2010). Interviews were recorded and transcribed and were solely analyzed by the researcher. Field notes were taken during the interviews and reflexive journaling (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) was conducted after the interview. A research log documented the thoughts of the researcher during the coding and analysis processes.

Potential bias was addressed by the creation of a subjectivity statement that identified the researcher's background relationships with the study participants. The researcher is positioned (Jones, et al., 2006) within the research, acknowledging the researcher within the study rather than observing from the outside. Furthermore, the data were provided to a peer/colleague for review at each step of the coding and analysis process.

Triangulation (Tracy, 2010) was established through multiple data sources including interviews, field notes, focus groups, reflection guides, teacher observations and photographs. Specifically, the annual, end-of-year focus groups provided triangulation of the monthly interviews as a reflection and peer consensus.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded theory guided the data analysis. First by positioning the researcher as an important part of the research process by writing an in-depth subjectivity statement identifying subjectivities through personal experiences and relationships with the participants. Next, reflexivity was exercised by engaging in reflective journaling during interviews and focus groups and by creating memos. Finally, during the analysis of data the researcher allowed themes to emerge from the data. The use of phenomenological case study was selected because it was a defined group. The constant comparative technique was used to analyze the data by employing multiple rounds of coding including open, axial and selective coding (Creswell, 2018).

The first step in data analysis was up-loading the transcripts into the NVivo 12 program. The researcher utilized the aid of a computer program to provide an organization system, to ease sorting and retrieval (Creswell, 2018). NVivo 12 was only used for structure, no automatic coding feature were employed. Transcripts were analyzed chronologically using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2018). The transcripts were reviewed in multiple rounds, first using open coding to separate the data into smaller segments, those categories were reviewed and connected using axial coding to create categories and finally reviewed using selective coding to create themes. The themes evolved and were revised over time and ultimately, results were developed into a codebook (Appendix G).

Additional analysis was made on the term the teachers identified that described their feelings toward teaching in one word each month over the three years. In an attempt to understand how their attitudes toward teaching changed throughout the year, and how that compared to their annual reflection guides, the terms they identified each month were specifically coded based on the nature of the word and the experiences they described with it. It is important to note, some terms are coded in two different categories and the context of how they presented the term was analyzed for 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 3.3. To create a visual representation of the teacher’s attitudinal changes, numeric vales were connected to the terms to visually represent the attitudinal shifts over time, the numeric values are also presented in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3**

*Terms Representing the Teachers Attitude Toward Teaching and Coding Summary*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>Numeric Value</b>	3	2	1
<b>Terms</b>	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		

Reflexivity was used in each stage of data collection and analysis, a reflective journal was used at the end of the interview, journaling happened at the end of each transcript being coded and journaling was used when each code was analyzed creating academic year quarter summaries from which the conclusions were made. At the conclusion of data analysis, a review of the data was conducted to see if a grounded theory had emerged.

The unique experiences of this group of teachers over their first three years of teaching informs members of the profession on their personal experiences. Their experiences will inform how we can better support beginning teachers in the profession through novice teacher programs.

## **Funding Sources**

Funds for this research project were support by the Kansas Association of Agricultural Educators (KAAE) who provided \$1,500 to support transcription costs for the research.

## **Conclusion**

Through my previous experiences as a teacher and researcher I understand how knowledge is constructed and know learning happens most effectivity when it is tied to prior learning and anchored in interactions. In my future roles of educator, agriculture teacher educator, and as a researcher I will seek to be a “passionate participant” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.112) in research that focuses on “communities of inquiry embedded in communities of practice” (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p.196) led by the ontological and epistemological views of constructionism, interpretivism, participatory and pragmatic lenses.

# **Chapter 4 - Successes and Challenges Experienced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in their First Three Years: A Collective Case Study**

## **Abstract**

*Studies show agriculture beginning agriculture teachers have a different experience than their seasoned colleagues, but how are their experiences different? This phenomenological collective case study tells the story of traditionally certified beginning agriculture teachers throughout their first three years of teaching. The study began with eight teachers in their first year and concluded with six teachers completing three years of teaching. Data collection includes an on-site visit including an observation of teaching, tour, and an in-person interview followed by monthly phone interviews. Each year concludes with the teachers completing a reflection guide and participating in a focus group. From the interview data, the collective strengths and challenges the teachers faced were presented by year. The findings address areas the profession should support beginning agriculture teachers though including increased feedback and mentoring for teachers, resources on student management, work/life balance, seeking funding and community relations.*

Keywords: novice teachers; beginning teachers; agriculture teachers; mentoring; traditionally certified

## **Introduction**

Perhaps the greatest challenge agricultural education is faced with is the shortage of agriculture teachers (Camp 2002; Foster et al., 2016; Kantrovich, 2010; Smith et al., 2017, 2018, 2019). The solution to the challenge lies in both recruitment and retention of teachers. This study

focused on retention of teachers and sought to learn about the experiences of beginning teachers to understand how they may be better supported early in their careers.

In the broader field of education, two major studies exist that strive to tell the story of the beginning teacher. Ellen Moir's (1999) work suggested teachers' attitudes towards teaching can be represented in phases in a linear design by month throughout the school year. Fessler and Christianson's work (1992) focused on the *Teacher Career Cycle* and which had eight stages, including the induction stage, specific to beginning teachers. This stage focused on "survival and discovery." Lynn (2002) further described this stage as when the teachers were socialized into the profession and sought acceptance. While dynamic, these studies leave the question; do they apply to the unique culture and schedules novice agriculture teachers experience?

Research focused on novice teachers show beginning agriculture teachers were generally happy in their jobs but overwhelmed with challenges related to classroom management, advising the FFA chapter, curriculum development and lesson planning, and managing paperwork. (Myers et al., 2005). Finally, for agriculture teachers, there can be a feeling of isolation when many are the only agriculture teacher in their school, district, or county (Greiman et al., 2005).

There exists a void in the research of in-depth longitudinal research and qualitative research that is not limited to the first-year teaching experience. The present study seeks to be "worthy" (Tracy, 2010) by working to fill this void in the literature base to understand the unique experiences of beginning agriculture teachers through an in-depth longitudinal qualitative study.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this phenomenological multiple case study is drawn from a broader investigation that sought to understand the experiences of beginning agriculture teachers during

their first three years of teaching. The present study was guided by the following research question:

1. What do teachers identify as their accomplishments and challenges during their first three years of teaching?

## **Theoretical Framework**

When conducting research, epistemology must be considered. How do we know what we know? In this qualitative study, constructionism guides the research. Constructionism states that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 2015, p. 9). Within Constructionism, the research is led by the theoretical perspective of interpretivism through phenomenology. Phenomenology was selected to learn about the lived experiences of the participants and guides the research as “a starting point and a basis” (Crotty, 2015, p.79). This is fitting since the longitudinal nature of the study followed the participants at the beginning of their teaching journey and offered touchpoints throughout the three years of the research on a monthly basis. Seeking the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Bhattacharya, 2017) meets the purpose of this study. Following the guide of Moustakas (1994), in this study “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p.34). Pragmatism influences the research as well, allowing for the use of multiple methods of data collection and consideration of the practical implications of the research (Creswell, 2018).

Moir’s (1999) meta-analysis showed the needs of beginning teachers were dynamic and complex, therefore a qualitative study is better suited to understand their unique experiences. Constructionism guided the research that sought to understand the lived experiences of beginning teachers. Interpretivism through Phenomenology provided an anchor and checkpoint (Crotty, 2009) for the research as all participants were experiencing the unique phenomenon of their first

years as a teacher. The Case Study design allowed for “using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Crotty, 2009, p.14). Constructivist Grounded Theory positioned the researcher within the study (rather than outside viewing in) by the creation of a subjectivity statement that outlined prior experiences and relationships with the participants and guided the role of the research in the collection and analysis of the data.

## **Methods**

The phenomenological case study design focused on the phenomenon of being a beginning agriculture teacher and allowed for “using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” which compliments the longitudinal study (Crotty, 2009 p. 14). Case study research influences what is studied by establishing a bounded system specifically defining the setting of the research based on time and place (Creswell, 2018). Utilizing collective case study design, the focus is on the phenomenon and utilizes multiple cases to describe the experience. When selecting multiple cases in a collective form it provides the ability to show different perspectives of the phenomenon they experience (Creswell, 2018). Within the case study design there are clear procedures to follow including purposeful sampling, holistic and embedded analysis, identification of themes based on the context gained by looking at specific cases followed by cross case analysis (Creswell, 2018). Constructivist Grounded Theory positions the researcher within the study (rather than outside viewing in) by the creation of a subjectivity statement that outlines prior experiences and relationships with the participants and guides the role of the research in the collection and analysis of the data (Bhattacharya, (2017).

An instrumental case study design was used and therefore one bounded system was established (Creswell, 2018). The bounded system (Merriam, 2009) was created by all

participants being agricultural education graduates from Kansas State University in the mid 2010 decade who chose to teach agriculture in Kansas upon graduation. Due to the small sample size, which is the case in many phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2018) graduates meeting the criteria of the bounded system were invited to participate in the study through an e-mail invitation. Eight teachers responded positively to the invitation and a visit to their school was scheduled during the first 4-6 weeks of school. All participants completed consent forms approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participant demographics changed over the three-year study, and a collective summary of the participants is provided to protect their individual identities. In year one, there were eight participants, seven females and one male. All participations were white and ranged in ages 22-25 in their first year of teaching. Six teachers were in programs where they were the only agriculture teacher, two teachers were in multi-teacher programs. One participant returned to their hometown to teach. One participant did not have high school agricultural education experiences. One teacher was married and two of the teachers each had one child.

In year two of the study there were seven teachers, of which one was male. Five teachers were the only ag teacher in their school and two were in multi-teacher programs. Two participants changed positions between years one and two, one moved from a single teacher program to a multi-teacher program and one moved from a multi-teacher program to a single teacher program. One participant left the study after year one due to time demands but, remained teaching agriculture in their original school. Two teachers were married and two each had a child.

In year three, there were six teachers, all female. One participant left the study and the teaching profession after year two to engage in production agriculture. Of the six teachers, two

were teaching in multi-teacher programs and the rest were the only agriculture teacher in their school. Two participants were married, and one had a child. One participant moved between years two and three to return to their home program. At the conclusion of the three-year study, seven of the eight original participants entered their fourth-year teaching agriculture.

The teachers taught in eleven different communities throughout the study. This includes the eight communities in which they started their teaching career, and the three communities' individuals moved to after their first-year teaching. The schools were in communities spread across the state of Kansas. Utilizing the United States Department of Agriculture (2019) definitions, two communities were greater than 2,500 in population and would be considered "urban clusters" while the other nine communities meet the definition of rural with populations less than 2,500 (para. 2). The community populations ranged from 414 to 3,983 (United States Census Bureau, 2020). All the communities were predominately white populations. Utilizing the Kansas State High School Activities Association classifications, five schools were classified as 1A with high school enrollments 14-108 students; four schools were classified as 2A with high school enrollments between 109-171 students; and two schools were classified as 4A with high school enrollments ranging between 312-661 students. All schools had predominately white populations.

Following the protocol for conducting interviews by Creswell (2018), creating research questions for the study was the first step of data collection. Since "conducting a phenomenological study involves primarily in-depth interviews" (Creswell, 2018) questions were carefully crafted to learn about the phenomenon through the eyes of these individuals. Questions were written to learn about their attitudes toward teaching, their perceived successes, and challenges. Based on information gained through the literature



review, specific questions about curriculum and planning, work/life balance, school and community culture were created (Boone & Boone, 2007; Myers et. al., 2005). In addition, the literature emphasized the role of mentors in successful teachers therefore a question on mentors was added (Tummons et al., 2016). After the questions were reviewed by an agricultural education professor, IRB protocol and informed consent were written and submitted. IRB approval was secured and a pilot interview testing the protocol was conducted. Guided by the case study design, multiple data forms were gathered alongside the interviews (Creswell, 2018) including site tours, photographs, informal introductions with administrators, participant observations teaching and finally focus groups.

The visit and interview protocol were piloted with a second-year agriculture teacher who was not engaged with the study. Adjustments were made to the protocol following a debriefing session with the pilot teacher. It is important to note that rapport (Creswell, 2018) was already established between the researcher and the study participants based on previous experience before the data collection process was initiated.

The researcher conducted a ½ day school site visit to each of the eight teachers between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> week of their school year. Multiple sources of information, according to case study design (Creswell, 2018), were collected during the visit during a tour which included: photos of the facilities, a participant guided tour of the school, an introduction to an administrator of participant's choice, an observation of a class of their choice and a 30 minute in-person interview was conducted and recorded thus, multiple sources of information were collected (Creswell, 2018). Each month during the school year following the initial meeting, the researcher conducted an approximately 30-minute semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) phone interview with each of the eight teachers. At the conclusion of each year, a 60 minute semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) focus

group was hosted using Zoom technology after participants had individually completed a researcher developed reflection guide. For teachers who transitioned schools between years one and two or year two and three, a site visit was conducted at their new location and the initial visit protocol was followed.

Ethical considerations were made to the anonymity of the participants by utilizing pseudonyms. Details about the participant profiles were presented in a composite profile (Creswell, 2018). Rigor and trustworthiness were ensured by selecting participants who were part of the established bounded system (Tracy, 2010). Interviews were solely analyzed by the researcher. Field notes were taken during and following the interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A research log documented the thoughts of the researcher throughout coding and analysis. Potential bias was addressed through the creation of the subjectivity statement that identified the researcher's background relationships with the study participants. The researcher was positioned (Jones, et al., 2006) within the research, acknowledging the researcher within the study rather than observing from the outside. Furthermore, the data were provided to a peer/colleague for review at each step of the coding and analysis process. Triangulation (Tracy, 2010) was established through multiple data sources including interviews, field notes, focus groups, reflection guides, teacher observations and photographs. Specifically, the annual, end-of-year focus groups provided triangulation of the monthly interviews as a reflection and peer consensus.

Data collection yielded 129 individual transcripts and three focus group transcripts. Each transcript was sent out to be transcribed. The researcher coded in NVivo 12 using the constant comparative method for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Guided by grounded theory data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), the three-phase coding process employed included open, axial and selective coding by the researcher, no automatic coding resources were utilized inside the

NVivo 12 program. Reflective journaling was utilized throughout the process to ensure reflexivity during and after interviews, at the conclusion of each coded transcript, and by summarizing codes by academic quarter for organizational purposes. An audit trail (Creswell, 2018) was created in the NVivo 12 program to document the thinking process the researcher used to make organizational decisions. Validity and reliability were ensured through comparison with focus group transcripts and by having a colleague review coded and analyzed data. Furthermore, a researcher subjectivity statement was created to position the researcher for data analysis. The researcher positioned herself as a former high school teacher and as a University agricultural education faculty member who taught each of the participating teachers a majority of their pre-service agricultural education courses during their undergraduate program.

From coding and analysis, the teachers' experiences emerged into major themes. Each theme was divided further into sub themes for deeper analysis. The themes and sub themes were analyzed by quarter and year resulting in the findings of this article.

The collective case study (Stake, 1995) approach helped understand the phenomenon in multiple settings but cannot be generalized to the general population as it presents the story and experiences of this group of individuals. The unique experiences of these teachers may contribute to theory and prompt future research.

## **Results**

The research objective was to learn what beginning agriculture teachers perceive as their strengths and challenges throughout their first three years. Following the flow of the school year, data were divided into four academic quarters per year yielding 12 independently analyzed quarters of data. Throughout the 12 quarters of data, four major themes emerged: program management, community, personal and school.

## Key Findings

### Year 1 Summary:

In all theme areas, teachers were found to be *thirsty for feedback* - compliments from community members, students, faculty and peers went a long way in driving them to continue to put in the time and effort to be the teacher they wanted to be. They were so thirsty for feedback they would “read in to” interactions to find feedback such as students moving into their classes or choosing to attend an FFA event which they had not been involved before was considered a compliment. Teachers measured their teaching quality on Career Development Event (CDE) success. In response to the question “what is going well” there is a theme in of responding with the most recent FFA events, for example Crystal responded with “We got sixth in poultry again as an A-team with all my returners. And so, we didn’t do worse than last year [with the previous teacher].”

### Theme 1: Program Management

The teachers’ experiences were largely *focused on the agricultural education program* and the school. Even conversations about themselves and the community were still predominately presented within the lens of the school and agricultural education program. Furthermore, their view of the school as a whole was directly related to their experiences through the agricultural education program.

*Curriculum and planning* took up a majority of their time in the evenings and weekends impacting work/life balance. They were searching for resources and designed lessons with a “just in time” focus rather than a holistic view of the curriculum experiences for students. FFA events, greenhouse sales and shop projects were driving the curriculum rather than the teacher using those to compliment the curriculum. Helen said, “In the next month, we have most of our

contests, so it's kind of hard to like plan around the contest...usually I find it not easy, but beneficial to kind of teach to the CDE days." Similarly, Wendy said "I am struggling with teaching CASE and getting the students ready for contests." Finding productive work for students to complete with substitute teachers and finding substitute teachers who hold students accountable was an additional challenge to the overall curriculum and planning process. Sophia described one situation, "last week, I had a substitute that just didn't really care, he sat in my office the whole time and either watched movies or took a nap. He didn't make the students do what they were supposed to do." The teachers identified their voids in content or delivery but oftentimes they felt like they could only get ahead and make positive change when there was a break from school. Claudia took advantage of the extra time over breaks to create the types of lessons she wanted, she described this as, "having some really cool lessons. Because I am going to spend some time during break starting lessons and coming up with some really cool activities." There was excitement when the teachers were able to use prior work, Hank said "I used my prior experience from last spring to do the same thing I did student teaching and made it better."

Developing *student relationships* was where the teachers were most comfortable. Initially there was overcoming the "I am not like the last teacher" situations, Crystal described it like this "The kids are not used to actually doing things and receiving a grade good or bad because of their work ethic...I'm not as laid back, I am more strict and structured." Similarly, Helen said, "I have to remind them like, "well, I'm not [name of last teacher]." They strategically planned ways to get to know the students and incorporate student specific information into the classroom. The teachers were gone frequently for FFA events, but noticed that it was during these activities when the student relationships were developed and those relationships continued to grow in the

classroom, for example, Claudia said “We’ve done a lot of FFA events lately. I’ve been able to talk to kids one-on-one, get to know them... they do respect me; they see me as their teacher and someone they can come to when they need help.” When students added the course at semester or pre-enrollment numbers were up for the following year the teachers were excited and motivated, but cautious that they did not want this interest to be based on their courses perceived as “too easy.”

Engagement with the *FFA program* provided the teachers an avenue for student relationships, allowed them to compare their work and the work of their students to others and served as a key motivator for everyone engaged with the program. However, FFA took up significant time managing fundraisers, preparing for and attending events, and working with the student leadership team. Wendy reflected on an experience at a CDE, “I had two students place in the top 10 for food science, so that was really exciting. And then seeing their faces after that... that’s one of the reasons that we do what we do, I’ve figured out.”

Teachers felt they spent as much or more time *managing student behavior* than teaching, Hank said “it seems like I am finding that I put more priority on teaching these kids on how to behave than the difference between an Angus and Hereford cow. The actual content.” Some of the challenges were based on personal and one-to-one technology provided by the school, students were not bringing the technology provided by the school ready to use, were misusing it or were distracted by personal devices. Sophia explained “try to get kids to stay off of cell phones and trying to pay attention in class, because they think social media and Snapchat and all that is a little more important.” Later in the year the biggest challenge transitioned into student motivation, Crystal said “it’s been tough, kids have really been slacking in getting assignments

turned in.” This challenge heightened as they entered the second semester when the weather got better, and the end of the year drew closer.

*Time management* was a consistent challenge throughout the first year. Clare said, “what I am most worried about is just staying on top of everything whether that is grading, lesson planning.” Wendy says “I had no idea how much time planning FFA anything, how much time it would take...I had no idea until like the first couple of weeks how much time you have to put in, but it’s worth it.” The expectations of the classroom and FFA surpassed the expectations for Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs) therefore, there were plans to get SAEs started at the beginning of the year but those plans were left to the side by the end of the year. Hank described his situation like this, he said “the classroom is rolling, FFA activities are ramping up and thinking about SAEs, we have been through quite a bit of coursework and it’s balancing a lot of things at one time and I see the point where it gets a little bit challenging.” The issues of time management were especially common in the fourth quarter, Clare said “it’s hectic because it has been CDE’s, the plant sale...but it just feels like there’s a million things to get done before the state convention is here and it’s a matter of us getting it all completed.”

## **Theme 2: Community**

Crystal explained her community involvement “the community just doesn’t really know who I am yet, I don’t know if that is because I am gone on weekends or what ... I may be lacking on visibility in the community.” Later in the year some of the teachers found ways to get connected to the community, Claudia said “I just joined the Lion’s Club, I’m the youngest lion by a few years. But it’s been – it’s fun meeting new people.” While some teachers felt they “inherited” long standing traditions the agriculture program has hosted to serve the community others worked to set new boundaries with community members “we have set a few

boundaries...I appreciate community members trust us enough to take care of some of these items for them, at the same time...it's completely a learning environment and I think there have been a few people who have been surprised.”

### **Theme 3: School**

The feedback received by *administrators* varied significantly in quantity and quality, but everyone wanted more. Some administrators conducted formal observations and feedback sessions and others did not. The administrators' expectations of the teachers also varied, some required weekly lesson plans and finals turned in a week in advance where others did not. Support from the administration varied among the schools but it was a major component of the teacher's morale and job satisfaction. Clare described her administrative support “I know regardless of any decision I have had to make or any questions I have had my principal and vice principal have stood by me.” In contrast Paige said, “we don't have complete support yet of our faculty members and administration.” Concerns with administration often focused on lack of communication, for example, Paige said “we don't ever have faculty meetings which is not good for our school because we need them.”

Another component of overall job satisfaction was *connections to the faculty*, some schools were very welcoming and made a point to have social gatherings and included the new teachers. Other faculty groups either did not have social gatherings or the beginning teachers were not included. Sophia said “just the friendships, playing in volleyball leagues and that kind of stuff together. It helps knowing that the faculty is behind your back and they are there to help and support you.” Claudia and Hank took working with the faculty to an even higher level as they designed cross-curricular work with the science department. Those working in multi-teacher programs spent time trying to balance the roles and responsibilities between the teachers. Helen



described her challenges, “it is to the point that person is not pulling their weight...and I am trying to pull the weight, and that is tough right now.”

The teachers spent significant time *learning the processes* in the school or if they do not, they later felt reprimanded because they didn’t know. Crystal described it like this “I’m getting told things very last minute and so then they get mad at me because I didn’t know, because somebody should have told me.” The teachers do not have the tools and equipment they felt they needed and were seeking external funding for the program for hydroponics systems, shop equipment and greenhouses. Claudia said “Our shop needs a lot of work. We have equipment that doesn’t run properly or doesn’t run at all, just really rundown stuff. So, I’ve been working with my welding boys to make a list of everything we need.” Claudia said, “I recently got approved for a grant, for hydroponics through our community foundation, yeah it’s like \$1,000.”

The teachers took on *additional responsibilities* in the school on top of agricultural education/FFA responsibilities to gain connections, for example, Claudia said “so the kids, they know who I am now even the ones I don’t have in class. I’m in charge of concession stands, so I see kids all the time now.” The teachers took on roles including starting and coaching the trap shooting team, running concessions stands, assistant track coach, assistant boys basketball coach, and as an assistant with after school tutoring. The teachers sought connections to overcome *feelings of separation* by being physically located away from the main school building or having a different lunch time than other teachers. Crystal said “I don’t eat with high school teachers, I have a middle school lunch and so I sit in on the FACS teacher’s 5<sup>th</sup> hour class because she has a microwave...I’m not very close with any of the teachers because I am so far away out here.”

*Mentoring* was initially focused on reaching out to their cooperating teachers, the teachers who served as their host during their student teaching internship. Once the formal

mentoring process in the schools got established there were regular meetings and they utilized the school-based mentor for more procedural and school process questions. One teacher was in a school who used an online mentoring program, this was not a positive experience for Paige, she said “I mean, technically, we have our online mentor. But she doesn’t really do much.” Peer mentoring emerged within the participant group, both sides of peer pairs talked about reaching out to each other for support and ideas, Paige said “Me and Wendy always – are always trading stuff, it’s like a daily event.” As the teachers attended more district level FFA events, they talked more about using experienced agriculture teachers in their district and less about their cooperating teachers, Crystal said “we had our CDE last Wednesday and so I was talking to some teachers in the district about some problems I was having. So, I’m using all of their life knowledge and asking them for help. That was really nice.” A lot of informal mentoring happened at the January Agricultural Education Symposium and they left the professional development event “inspired with some new ideas” said Crystal.

#### **Theme 4: Personal**

Throughout the year, finding a comfortable *balance between their work and personal life* was a challenge. The teachers started each semester with a feeling of excitement and were refreshed after a break, at the mid-point of each semester they became overwhelmed. In a search for more balance, the teachers set expectations for themselves such as taking at least one day a week off from school work, not taking work home or setting a hard deadline on when to head home, Clare said “most times I try to leave here no later than 7 pm.” As they were working in a very demanding job, they were still working to balance the life of an early career adult, there were changes in family dynamics (engagements, children, etc.), renting and purchasing homes, and making plans for graduate school happening while they were starting in the profession. At

the end of the year this was especially difficult, Claudia said laughingly, “I don’t have a lot of balance right now. Between teaching, the officers, track and all of that.”

By the end of the year they were all ready for a break, they had identified the changes they wanted to make next year and how they would go about making them and many had made plans for specific professional development over the summer. Wendy reflected on her teaching “I need to say this is where we’re going to go, this is what we’re going to learn, and this is how we are going to get there...being firm with it and staying with it.” Hank said, “we have some potential next year to offer some different courses, we are adding two more courses.” Some of the teachers were making decisions to become further committed to the community and the agricultural education profession, others were looking for other opportunities that might arise soon. Overall, the teachers *enjoyed their jobs* but, they were challenged by how to get everything done to be the teacher they wanted to be.

## **Year 2 Summary**

Year two started with an *increased feeling of preparedness* and knowing what to expect. Hank described his feelings at the beginning of the year as “I feel more prepared, but at the same time I know that there will be challenges, there will be unseen challenges.” Some of those “unseen challenges” quickly arose such as not having enough classroom chairs and desks for increased enrollment, dealing with storm damage to the greenhouse and shop windows, adapting to technology changes and learning a new system for those teachers who transitioned schools between year one and two. The feeling quickly turned to one of feeling behind and *overwhelmed* again in late October through mid-December. The teachers were better able to predict what they needed to get done, but still struggled to find the time to accomplish it. They were significantly more proactive in parent communication in the first semester when compared to their first year

such as hosting a beginning of the year parent night, sending information to parents about joining FFA and they more readily reached out to parents when students were underperforming academically. Hank said “I’m starting something I’ve heard of other advisors and teachers doing, and previously to this year I just couldn’t believe I had time to do it. This year I’m making the time...I sent an e-mail for every class to all the parents.”

### **Theme 1: Program Management**

*Time management* continued to be a challenge, there was a general feeling of being less behind than last year, but still unable to get ahead. Paige said, “I feel like I stay on pace for like a day but getting ahead never happens.” *Facilities and equipment* contributed to the time management crunch, the teachers were dealing with a frozen greenhouse, mealy bugs, equipment repair, a lack of equipment and supplies, or managing multiple classrooms. Growth in some of the classes further contributed to a lack of needed equipment and supplies. Paige said, “So hopefully we can figure that out tomorrow before – but I don’t have seats for 28 kids.”

*Student relationships* were continuing to develop for those in the same school and the teachers who transitioned were starting over. Those returning noticed the classes started at a different point when everyone already knew each other. Claudia talked about how comfortable her students were with her, “I’ve got a couple of kids that come to me and talk to me about stuff that’s going on in their lives because they are so comfortable opening up to me...I am glad they have someone they can come to.” Student motivation was the most significant student management challenge. Teachers felt better about management of the *FFA* program but were surprised by challenges they had to overcome in the first semester from removing a chapter officer from the team, managing events they had never done before and facilitating errors in t-shirt sponsorships. Just when they felt like they knew how to manage things, something

unexpected would pop up. They wanted to ask for help from others and give more ownership to the leadership team by delegating tasks, but there was concern turning over projects to the student leaders they did not know exactly how to do themselves. Furthermore, while some teachers felt like the spring was the most demanding, Wendy described her fall like this, “this is the busiest time for Ag programs, national convention, fruit and meat sales...your roster, your POA and everything as a new teacher it’s still like you don’t trust anyone, you want to make sure you get it done.” They acknowledged things were easier than last year, but still challenging.

Now that they had the increased comfort level with the classroom and FFA a few began to shift some attention to *SAE*. The teachers who attended the SAE for All conference discussed fewer hurdles and more solutions to SAE integration than those who did not. Claudia attended the training and said “starting with my freshmen class...they are going to have to come up with something and keep records over it. I didn’t do any SAE last year really and I want to try to hit those a little harder this year.” In contrast, Crystal said “I’m still struggling with the whole SAE component...I really just need to sit down and go through AET and just take the time to do it with them and they’re going to complain a little.”

*Curriculum and planning* still took a significant amount of time. Their feeling of preparedness related to this topic was directly related to the amount of time they had dedicated to working on it over the summer. Hank said, “Planning still isn’t like my strong suit, I feel like coming in this summer I didn’t spend as much time planning as I should...I have unit plans but I just don’t feel prepared if that makes sense.” Those who had taken time to re-vamp curriculum over the summer felt really good about where they were, others were making similar mistakes they experienced the first year and knew they could do better but could not find the time to make it happen. At the mid-point of each semester, there was again the challenge of finding productive

work for students to do with substitutes and getting high quality substitutes. Crystal said, “I’ve been gone so much, I’m really never there. I counted out how many days I’ve been gone this year between FFA and personal and I’ve been gone 30...my kids never see me, I never see them, and we haven’t got through much content in the past month.” Overall, year two was easier than year one, but still harder than they had anticipated.

## **Theme 2: Community**

There was not as much discussion focused on the community this year, perhaps they are getting more comfortable in their new surroundings. The teachers described an increase in both purposeful and casual *community engagement*. Many teachers increased their engagement through a summer job or coaching summer league ball. Those who resided outside of the district had more challenges with community engagement. Claudia stated “A lot more people know me in the community now. I mean I go to all the ball games and stuff; I buy as much local things as I can for myself and for the school.”

## **Theme 3: Personal**

*Work/Life balance* was impacted by not only the demands of the Ag Ed program but the additional responsibilities they accepted. The teachers took on *additional responsibilities* within the school including coaching, prom sponsorship, assistant activities director, and concession stands. It was unclear if they were pressured into these responsibilities or sought them out. Surprisingly, the motivation to take on these responsibilities was not financial, rather they were seeking a way to connect with students and faculty outside of the agriculture program and give them something else to focus on. Claudia said “I had to find a balance because I am coaching volleyball and I am still in-charge of concession stands and you name it and I’m the one that gets thrown into it because I’m really the one not married and doesn’t have kids.”

#### **Theme 4: School**

The use of *formal mentors* in the school from year one varied among the teachers. Some continued to use the same person on a regular, but less frequent basis compared to the previous year. Others found a different resource person in the school than they had originally been assigned. If the mentor they were formally assigned left the school, they were not re-assigned and sought out support on their own. Teachers who moved schools between year one and two were not assigned a new mentor and sought out the support from other teachers and parents. Although in-school mentors were used less often, there was still a need for support from a mentor in the school. All the teachers utilized agriculture mentors as well, many identified at least two other people, often one being a peer and the other a mentor within their FFA district. The peer interactions were still present, but less frequent, Wendy said “I don’t feel like I talk to someone daily like I always shoot someone in our [graduating] class [cohort] a text probably weekly still.” Some of the best support was received informally as they gathered during FFA events or Ag Ed Symposium. Hank said “I look forward to career development events days because that’s when I have a lot of conversations, [Ag teacher] has continued to be helpful in times of need...so that’s nice having him so close.” The teachers sought out mentoring, but less frequently and on more specific topics than first year teachers. Teachers in multi-teacher programs needed mentoring support, but their needs were different than single teacher programs. They were also faced with balancing the distribution of roles and responsibilities and bridging the program through co-teacher transitions.

The teachers were seeking agricultural education *professional development* and showed remorse if they missed Summer Conference or Agricultural Education Symposium. Helen said, “I do feel like I missed out not going to summer conference, so I think I’m going to next year,

I'll kick everything aside because I didn't get to go last year." They enhanced this with additional professional development on topics unique to each person such as inquiry-based instruction, additional CASE certifications or agricultural mechanics construction. Claudia said, "I went to the inquiry-based learning training in Junction City this summer, that's helped a lot too when I've been coming up with lessons." As they finished their second year there was a wide range in professional development plans before year three. Some teachers engaged in multiple professional development opportunities while others elected to not engage in any.

### **Year 3 Summary**

They were more comfortable sharing the responsibility of the program. Clare said "I feel like I let go of control over a bunch of stuff this year like before, you know, I'm a perfectionist and I like to be in control of everything. And so, this year, I kind of just let my officers do all the planning for all our events." Some teachers have been so focused on professional development, they were feeling the need to step back, Claudia said "this summer is kind of weird for me because I am actually not doing any professional development (PD) like the last three it has just been full of PD and I've been gone all the time but this summer I am not doing anything so I can finish my thesis." They were also analyzing their additional responsibilities and Clare said, "we are looking for someone else to take over the concession stands." They became more comfortable saying "no" to protect the time they dedicate to the agriculture program and their personal lives.

### **Theme 1: Program Management**

When compared to earlier years, teachers were more focused on *motivating students* than developing relationships. Student relationships continued to be important to the teachers, but they were easier now that they knew most of their students prior to starting classes. They



believed getting to know new students and specifically with students they had not previously connected with was critical. For those who were more challenged by building student relationships they were aware of how important they were and worked to create a plan for success in that area. Clare said “relationship building is my professional development goal this year. And so, my goal is to do one activity each nine weeks in each one of my classes.” To increase student motivation the teachers provided more input to the student on what they will learn via alternative assignments allowing the students more freedom of choice on the topic they study or the way they presented the information. The teachers were quicker to identify groups or individual students to monitor more closely to avoid issues getting out of control. Wendy said, “I definitely noticed I have more confidence in myself...you don’t give them a chance to do anything.” They were also clearer with their expectations, Clare said “I get a little bit black and white with how I see things...like if their kids just don’t read the directions or the instructions that are pretty well laid out...it’s not my fault their grade isn’t the greatest.” There were times in the midst of tragedy that teachers truly learned their important role in mentoring students, when students came to them for advice in the most difficult times. During the fourth quarter there was an increase in significant student management challenges they had not experienced in prior years, many teachers talked about it being harder to motivate students and be productive when other teachers in the building have shut down. They wished administrators would instill expectations that all teachers will push through the end of the school productively.

At the beginning of their third year the teachers mentioned goals set for *FFA* such as increasing membership or attending National FFA Convention for the first time. There were concerns about the student leadership team like working to avoid “drama” and follow through. Helen said, “I have concerns for my officer team. They have a lot of really good ideas and they

work together really well but I think communicating what all of them are doing needs to be better.” Once again, the demands of the FFA program between National FFA Convention and fruit sales delivery caused strain on time management and was overwhelming for students and teachers. Helen said, “I think managing the ag program as a whole has been tough because I feel like I don’t have enough time, I don’t have enough time with the kids. I tried to schedule a ritual practice all week.”

*Curriculum and planning* were time consuming, but significantly easier than previous years. The teachers were reviewing what they had made in the past and making changes to enhance it. Claudia said, “I just take a few minutes and go through the lesson, make sure it’s what I want it to be...it’s been way less stressful than the last two years because I have some basis of what to go off of.” There were examples of integration of new tools such as interactive notebooks, more labs and hands on activities and increased student engagement. Paige said, “I do interactive notebooks with them, I’ve been putting a lot of time into making my sample one and trying to get that a little bit more organized now that I kind of know about them better than last year.” There was a stronger focus on student learning as explained by Crystal, “I’m getting the feel of the kids and if we need to take an extra day to do something then that’s ok...I want the kids to really understand the content.” However, the teachers were moving through curriculum at a faster pace than in the years past and were making choices on what to add at the end of the semester with the additional time. When seeking curriculum resources, they had a clearer idea of what they were looking for, some need content in specific areas while others acknowledge they needed creative delivery ideas to compliment the content they were comfortable with.

## **Theme 2: Community**

The teachers were focusing on engaging and sharing information about the program to the *community* more than they had in the past. They were utilizing newspaper articles, newsletters, and social media to spread information about the program to the community. The increased awareness of the program was followed by positive feedback through supportive comments, an increase in volunteers reaching out to the program, and a more engaged community at events. Helen said “I really want to do some more community driven events because it seems like [school] for the longest time, has kind of like, had its hand out and they haven’t really given to the community as much as they could. So, we’re still trying to come up with more ideas.” They were not talking as much about needing to get more involved in the community like they did in the first two years. For Wendy, engagement with the community was a morale boost, “I go out into the community and then, ‘oh, you’re doing such a good job.’ I don’t know, it doesn’t seem like I’m doing a great job, but everyone else says, so I am trying to keep doing my best.”

## **Theme 3: Personal**

*Work-life balance* was still a challenge, but they had developed coping mechanisms to make it better. While some teachers held themselves to a strict “no work at home” rule and/or set strict times they would be home by, others had embraced a work/life integration model that included their family into the agriculture program in appropriate ways. They mentioned how spouses may step up in the busy times of the year knowing that a break was often coming soon when they can balance the home duties back out. Although still a challenge, the teachers had found ways to find more balance than in previous years and had the ability to plan for especially busy times. Claudia said “yesterday was food sales stuff, definitely all work and no life. But I

was still like compared to –my first year teaching or even last year, I feel like I had – I’m able to leave work at work and then have more of a life outside of school, which definitely helps.”

Teachers who felt specifically better at work-life balance made mention of how they worked to strategically utilize every minute of their planning period to ensure they were able to be home at a reasonable time. Furthermore, the demands outside of the classroom were increasing, several teachers had begun graduate school and used time in the evenings and weekends to study. Many were still engaged with additional responsibilities in the school, but there were comments about letting those go soon. Helen said “I have made a decision for next year not to do cheerleading because I feel like I want to give more of my time to teaching and FFA in the ag program. And that would just give me a little bit more time too, with work-life balance.” Those in multi-teacher programs relied on the other teachers to help run the program and when they were out for medical leave or transitioned to a new program those changes increased their work responsibilities.

#### **Theme 4: School**

Teachers who balanced some time off in the summer and time engaged with *professional development* and planning started the year refreshed with new plans and ideas. Those who traveled with students to multiple events and engaged in multiple professional development activities, lacked a break over the summer and started the school year already feeling behind. It was possible to “overdo” summer professional development, some felt the need to slow down the summer after their third year because they experienced burn-out over the last few. However, those who took a more moderate pace on professional development did not feel the same. Some shifted their professional development focus to graduate coursework as they sought a graduate

degree. Claudia said, “Yeah, I am taking this summer off. I have got my thesis and then moving and that kind of stuff. I just figured I needed a little break from PD and stuff for now.”

*Mentoring* was no longer a formal process. The teachers could now assess what they needed to know more about and were focused on seeking out mentors who had expertise in that specific area. Wendy said “Trying to get a couple of things for our small gas engines, talking to older guys in the district, [local ag teacher] and [local ag teacher] seeing what they do and stuff. And I’ve talked to [peer] a couple of times to get things from her.” Utilizing peer mentors had been very common for this group of teachers, but they were communicating less with their peers now. Conversations that did happen were simple exchange of ideas related to a specific topic. Claudia said I reach out to “my class and then the class below me, I am always like “hey, have you taught this? How have you taught it?” They did not feel like novice teachers but did not feel they have the experience to move into a formal mentoring role yet. However, this group of teachers was being called upon to serve in mentoring roles to undergraduate agricultural education students, within their schools, and profession. As new faculty members were hired in the school, they were reaching out to them to provide support, Crystal said, “she asked me a lot over the summer about how I planned my day, because she went from block scheduling to eight periods here.” In contrast Helen said, “I am not a mentor for anyone at this moment. I would like to maybe mentor somebody if I could, but I don’t know if I’m that knowledgeable.”

Relationships with *administration* seemed to be either very positive or very negative with few in between. Crystal said, “I think I’ll ultimately only be making him happy and I’m going to have to settle with whatever I get.” In contrast, Paige said, “It gives me confidence that my principal pulls me in for those kinds of things [seeking an opinion].”

Overall, the third year was *easier but there were places where they can be surprised*, new challenges could pop up they had not experienced before so the learning curve was still present. They appreciated having a better idea of what to expect related to curriculum, FFA events and activities and had developed individual strategies to balance their work and life responsibilities. They were generally happy with their jobs and could identify areas where they wanted to grow.

## Conclusions

The research question sought to identify areas of accomplishments and challenges faced by beginning agriculture teachers in their first three years of teaching. The data tables 4.1-4.3 represent the areas identified by the participants of this collective case study by year.

In year one, the teachers were seeking any type of feedback they could find. Generally, they were confident in their ability to develop relationships, first with students, then faculty and finally the community. Daily decisions were based on the immediate impact on the agricultural education program. Most of their challenges were focused on finding time to get everything done and at the level they wanted to. Learning processes and procedures, lesson planning, and preparing for events all took more time because they were all new experiences. A summary of their successes and challenges in year one is provided in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Accomplishments and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year One*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Growing student numbers	Feedback and measuring success
Student leadership team	School processes & logistics
Student learning	Curriculum and planning
Student relationships, faculty relationships and community relationships (in that order)	Student management – specifically special education students, technology management and student motivation
Student-centered classroom	Time management
Long term planning	Change

Community support	SAE's
Diversifying opportunities provided to students	Work/life balance

The overarching theme for the teachers in year two was an increased feeling of preparedness. They still had things to learn related to process and content, but it was easier than the first year and they had a better idea of what to expect. Student relationships continued to be a strength, advising the FFA chapter was easier and they did a better job communicating with the community about the agricultural education program and in return received positive feedback. Work/life balance was better, but there were times in the year it was still hard, even overwhelming. When the teachers faced challenges, it was easier to identify informal mentors who could provide solutions and advice. The growing student relationships caused a challenge with significantly larger classes. Funding was a challenge to have the facilities and equipment they needed for their growing programs and to add additional opportunities for students. Planning was easier for those who had documented their lessons from last year, but there were still content areas they wanted to grow in. Student motivation became a growing challenge.

**Table 4.2**

*Strengths and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year Two*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
FFA is smoother	Significant class size changes
Informal mentoring	Facilities and equipment
Student relationships	Curriculum planning
Student learning	Lack of student motivation
Community relationships	Funding
Work/life integration or more balance	Planning – better but still hard
Additional roles	Experience with specific events
Faculty relationships	Overwhelmed

In year three, the teachers had a shared responsibility of the program and were more likely to delegate tasks to students or rely on adult volunteers. However, there were many times where they were still surprised with situations that had not arisen prior to this year. Students in the classroom were provided more input and freedom of choice in what and how they learned. They are more confident in their teaching abilities having refined their lessons over time, there are more established classroom routines and they exercised an increased classroom awareness. There is more community and parent support as a result of increased communication over time. There are still challenges, and one is time. Managing the FFA chapter takes significantly more time than they feel it should. In the classroom, they are moving through content faster, and are seeking additional information to teach in many courses. SAE's are beginning to be established, but still not where they would like them to be, student motivation is a factor in SAE establishment and in the classroom.

**Table 4.3**

*Strengths and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year Three*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Providing students input and freedom of choice	Time management – FFA is especially demanding
Improvement of previous lessons	Finding additional content to add to courses as they now move through content faster
Established classroom routines	Student lack of motivation
Increased classroom awareness	In the moment needs from mentors on specific topics
Curriculum planning, identifying curriculum needs and selecting resources	SAE
Delegation of FFA responsibilities to student leaders	Student management (behavior) both in the classroom and at FFA events
Positive relationships	Social media
Community support as a result of increased communication	



## **Implications & Recommendations**

As previous literature shows, and aligns with the findings of this research, classroom management, advising the FFA chapter, curriculum development, lesson planning and school paperwork (Myers et al., 2005) are notable challenges faced by beginning agriculture teachers. One way to help alleviate some of these challenges is through mentoring programs which should work to support the unique needs of beginning agriculture teachers. Mentoring programs both within the school and the agricultural education profession can help beginning teachers through the feeling of isolation they may experience (Greiman et al. 2005). It is important to note, this project does not create an all-encompassing list of topics, rather topics that were sought by this specific group of teachers. Effective mentoring and induction programs need to seek information from the teachers they are serving about their accomplishments and challenges they are experiencing.

Perhaps unique to this study is the finding that teachers are seeking (and not receiving) feedback on a regular basis and on all aspects of being an agriculture teacher. Multiple entities need to come together to provide the multi-tiered support needed by the teachers. They need “go-to” resources in their school and through the FFA district and state agricultural education organization. These “go to resources” provide details about policies and procedures teachers can access when they need them. For example, a school could provide details on requesting a substitute and an FFA association could provide a video on how to submit the roster at the state level. These are tasks teachers may need to complete outside of “office hours” and need access to the information at that time. Even if they have been told the process, they may not be able to remember the details in the moment they need the information. The teachers flourished when

allowed to work with and problem solve with their peers, establishing a network of peers increases the sense of belonging in the profession.

In year one, attention should be focused on helping teachers identify their challenges early and develop coping mechanisms prior to the middle of the fall semester when they become more overwhelmed. Special attention should also be paid to the teachers when preparing them to enter the mid-Spring semester stretch of increased job demands of the job. In year two, the teachers need help doing self-analysis of their performance and their program and getting connected with the specific resources they need. In year three teachers should be leading the program and be supported in new initiatives and provided mentoring and resources specific to the areas of growth they were seeking for themselves as teachers and the long-term goals for the agricultural education program.

The scope of this study was narrow, focusing on traditionally certified teachers who are all white teaching in rural predominately white communities. Future research opportunities exist in conducting a similar study with a more diverse population of teachers and/or schools This study did not address the non-traditionally certified teacher's experiences which may be significantly different, more research is needed in this area for the profession to be better informed to support all types of beginning agriculture teachers. Further research should compare the experiences of the beginning agriculture teacher to other beginning professionals in education and agriculture to determine what is unique to the agricultural education beginning professional.

The mentoring experiences should also be examined further to explore the role of the mentors to beginning teachers, including formal and informal mentors they use in the school, the agricultural education profession and as peer mentors. Each type of mentor is unique in the role they play to the developing teacher.

How does the beginning teacher experience compare to teachers in other stages in Fessler and Christianson's (1992) *Teacher Career Cycle*? We now understand what beginning teachers need to know or might be challenged by, but how is the best way to deliver support, content, and resources to beginning teachers?

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## **Chapter 5 - Induction Programs for Beginning Agriculture**

### **Teachers: Research-Based Recommendations on Program Structure and Content**

#### **Abstract**

*“New teachers need more than mentors; they need induction programs that acculturate them to the school and equip them for the classroom” states Harry Wong (2002, p.52). The shortage of teachers, specifically agriculture teachers, has been established and literature shows us why some teachers choose to leave. The question remains, how can we provide induction programs to agriculture teachers that support their unique needs and ultimately retain beginning agriculture teachers in the profession long term? This longitudinal qualitative case study began with eight teachers and followed six traditionally certified beginning agriculture teachers through their first three years of teaching. The collective case study gathered data from site visits, monthly interviews, and annual focus groups. Recommendations are made for components that should exist in any induction program for beginning agriculture teachers. The content beginning teachers may need, how to structure a program, and items mentors and facilitators need to be aware of when providing a comprehensive program are provided. These components include developing a supportive community among the teachers, providing as needed resources, multiple mentors, feedback on teaching and structured reflection. According to the National FFA Association, “the shortage of qualified agriculture teachers is the greatest challenge facing FFA and agricultural education,” this study works to provide solutions to that challenge.*

Keywords: novice teachers; beginning teachers; agriculture teachers; mentoring; induction programs; professional development

## Introduction

The greatest challenge facing education is the lack of qualified teachers. The United States attrition rate for teachers was approximately 8% from the mid-2000s to mid-2010s (Ingersoll, 2002; Sutchter et al., 2016) which was significantly higher than other high achieving countries which ranged from 3%-4%. The teacher shortage is directly affecting agricultural education and the quality of agriculture programs nationwide. The need for agriculture teachers is well-documented (Camp 2002; Foster et al., 2016; Kantrovich, 2010; Smith, et al., 2017, 2018, 2019). While teacher recruitment is key to a long-term solution to the teacher shortage, the most immediate solution lies in teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2002). Sutchter et al. (2016) supported this notion by stating “reducing [teacher] attrition by half could virtually eliminate shortages” (“The significance of attrition” section).

Challenges facing education policy, such as the nationwide teacher shortage, meets the definition of a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973) due to the complexity of the challenge and the many factors that contribute to the issue. One of the factors contributing to the teacher shortage is teachers leaving the profession, especially in the early years of their career. Furthermore, increased enrollment has also increased the number of teachers needed, the demand (Ingersoll, 2002). Beginning teachers have attrition rates even higher than the national average (Sutchter et al., 2016) and those who are not fully prepared to teach leave at the highest rates. The factors contributing to the teacher shortage include increased demands on teachers, more teachers being needed, a shortage in supply with fewer students entering undergraduate teaching programs and policy that allows teachers who are not fully certified into the classroom (Sutchter et al., 2016). The costs associated with re-hiring and re-training a teacher is significant, ranging from nearly \$10,000 per teacher in suburban areas to up to \$26,502 in high need urban areas



(Watlinton et al., 2010). Ronfeldt et al. (2013) also suggested high rates of teacher transitions create financial impacts on school districts as well as strains on human resources working to mentor and train the new teachers.

According to the National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, (Smith et al., 2019) in 2018 there were at least 1,092 new agriculture teachers hired nationwide. Of these, 618 were traditionally certified through an undergraduate, graduate, or licensure program leaving 363 alternatively licensed and 111 non-licensed. There is a significant need nationwide to serve both groups of beginning professionals. To satisfy this need, challenges facing beginning teachers must be identified and addressed in an induction program. There needs to be a focus placed on induction support for early career teachers, those in their first years of teaching. Igo and Perry (2019) cited the top teacher training/professional development need of those teachers who left the teaching profession was “inadequate training to support the position” (p. 117). The teachers in this study who left averaged 3.25 years in the classroom, thus, an effective induction program needs to span beyond the first year of teaching.

Prior research has addressed content-specific needs of beginning agriculture teachers as identified by Myers et al. (2010) including classroom management, advising the FFA Chapter, and curriculum development and lesson planning. These items were identified as “major problems faced by beginning agriculture teachers” (p. 50). Figland et al. (2019) found agriculture teachers with 1-5 years of experience wanted professional development related to teaching in a laboratory and managing instructional facilities. Each of these can be supported through professional development programs.

Finally, teacher retention ultimately influences recruitment of future teachers. Clemons and Lindner (2019) stated that former teachers have the greatest influence on a student’s decision

to pursue agricultural education as a career. Investments in our beginning teachers will increase retention, improve quality of instruction, and have a positive impact on future generations of agriculture teachers through recruitment.

Across the nation the support for beginning teachers varies in expectations, requirements and funding. For the agricultural education profession, it is essential for beginning agriculture teacher programs to be designed with the specific needs of agriculture teachers in mind. There exists a paucity of research in the literature base to adequately support the ideal content and structure of such programs based on input from teachers in their induction years.

Teacher induction programs must be structured to meet the unique needs of beginning teachers. Fessler and Christensen (1992) designed the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* 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 pertinent to this study is the induction stage of the model that focused on the first few years of employment and discussed how the teachers are socialized into the school environment (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). During this stage, the teachers are seeking acceptance by everyone around them, administration, faculty, and students. The teachers are generally unsure of their own ability to effectively teach but are treated just like their veteran peers which caused the teachers to enter survival mode when they focus on day to day decisions rather than long term planning. This survival mode naturally caused the teachers to question their career and wonder if it gets better (Fessler & Christensen, 1992). Once the teachers break through the survival mode, they can think about teaching strategies and learner outcomes.

More (1999) specifically, breaks down the experiences within the first year into phases including anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and a return to

anticipation. Becoming familiar with the phases beginning teachers may experience and specific points in the year when they may need additional support allows for development of a comprehensive teacher induction program to develop teacher's self-efficacy in managing all aspects of their position as well as their emotional response to their experiences.

To ensure professional development is effective, Desimone (2009) cites five core features that should be present in all professional development: focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. Desimone (2009) reminded us that professional development includes formal and structured activities as well as casual "hallway conversation" and that all learning activities teachers engaged in contributed to their growth.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

This phenomenological multiple case study sought to understand the experiences of beginning agriculture teachers during their first three years of teaching to determine what content should be provided in an induction program and how a program should be structured to meet their unique needs. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What content should be provided in an induction program to meet the needs of beginning agriculture teachers?
2. How should an induction program be structured to meet the needs of beginning teachers?

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The findings presented in this article are the result of a larger investigation – an extensive three-year longitudinal study that involved site visits, monthly interviews, and annual focus groups. The study began with eight participants in year one and concluded with six participants in year three. Theoretical framework and methods section which would normally appear here are excluded. *These sections are identical to those presented in a companion article also under*

*review 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., under review).*

In summary, all eight participants were graduates in agricultural education in the mid 2010 decade who taught agriculture in Kansas, there were seven females and one male. Methods included a site visit, monthly interviews using semi structured interviews and focus group and reflection guide completed annually throughout the three-year study. Guided by grounded theory data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) the open, axial and selective coding was conducted by the researcher, reflective journaling and an extensive audit trail were utilized throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2018). Through this analysis, major themes developed and the collective case study (Stake, 1995) approach was used to understand the unique phenomena these beginning teachers experienced.

## **Results**

The research objectives were to determine the content and structure to best meet the needs of beginning agriculture teachers in an induction program. Following the flow of the school year, data were divided into four academic quarters per year yielding 12 independently analyzed quarters of data. Throughout the 12 quarters of data collection, themes were identified related to induction program needs. These themes included program management, personal, community, and school. Once the initial themes were categorized, the areas of support an induction program could impact emerged under content, structure, and awareness. *Content* included theme topic areas that could be provided through professional development, *structure* suggested how teachers wanted to be supported and *awareness* were items unrelated to content

or structure, but topics that would inform individuals facilitating and supporting induction teachers.

## **Key Findings**

The needs of the beginning teachers that were shared collectively and could be met through an induction program were divided into themes. The themes utilized included content, structure, and awareness and were organized by year.

### **Content related needs in Year 1**

The teachers were concerned about *obtaining supplies and equipment* they needed in the agriculture program to be the type of teacher they wanted to be. For some it was figuring out how to request supplies for labs and a timeframe that assured processing through the school to get the supplies in time for instruction. Clare said “I felt like anytime I had questions it was just a matter of asking who the right person is, I’m needing to put in a lot of requisitions to get my CASE supplies...we’ve been having some issues with accounts and like they are saying it is correct but the system is saying it's not correct ... that's probably the biggest headache.” For others, significant time and effort were invested in seeking external funding for the agriculture program for larger equipment such as welders and greenhouses. Sophia said “I just finished two grants this month. I sent one off today...I am doing everything I can right now to help our department grow and get a greenhouse.” What is the cause of this need? A lack of school funding? An unwillingness to ask for needed resources? They view the lack of supplies and/or equipment as a hinderance to the quality of teaching they can provide. Claudia said, “our shop needs a lot of work, we have equipment that doesn’t run properly or doesn’t run at all” similarly, Paige said “we have major ventilation problems in the welding shop.” A lack of communication

with the administration, perhaps caused by the teacher not asking, on how to obtain needs and wants seems to be present.

*Student management* was a theme throughout the year, however, the focus of the challenge changed. At the beginning of the year the challenge was focused on helping students transition to a new teacher, as Crystal emphasized “the kids are not used to actually doing anything and receiving a grade good or bad because of their work ethic.” Once relationships began to get established, there was a challenge managing one-to-one technology, having the technology ready to use and using it in a productive manner. This was further complicated by trying to manage the personal devices students also bring into the classroom, Sophia said “a lot of kids are like ‘oh I don’t have mine charged’ or ‘I forgot it at home’ ...today [Student] was using his phone to look it up because he said his iPad was at home charging.” Later in the semester, the technology challenges were nearly absent as they identified new ways to manage and utilize the technology in the classroom. The theme transitioned to student motivation as the end of the first semester drew near. Hank said, “it seems like I am finding that I put more priority on teaching these kids how to behave than...the actual content.” Wendy talked about students not being motivated by grades, “they don’t care about grades...they don’t care about anything, so I think that’s my most difficult problem right now is students not caring.” This lack of motivation was evident again towards the end of the school year as Claudia said, “the nicer weather they are just crazy and want to be outside...it is hard to stay motivated.” During the fourth quarter there was an increase in more significant student behavior infractions such as using illegal substances and posting inappropriately to social media.

Teachers sought support related to the *SAE and FFA responsibilities* of their position. For those who attended National FFA Convention, there was a lot of planning and in many cases

“catching up” to do to in planning if the previous teacher had not gotten things taken care of before they left. “I had no idea how much time planning FFA, anything, would take. I definitely understand why we have extended contracts now...I don't think anyone realizes except advisors how much time, effort you have to put in for everything to go right” Wendy said. Not all attended National FFA Convention due to lack of finances or support. Novice teachers used CDE/LDE success or lack of success as a measure of their personal success, their students, and programs because during the first few months of the school year, this may be the only measure they had. Hank said, “our greatest success was last week we had our district CDE’s and...we were able to take home third as a team and had a top individual and the second individual in the top 10, so that was a good experience.” During the second academic quarter the FFA fundraising activities were very demanding (Fruit and Meat Sales, Concession Stands, etc.) on their time and the teachers were seeking support on how to manage them. Crystal said, “Today our fruit and meat truck actually arrived while I was trying to figure out what was the best way to be organized and trying to deal with the orders and I never really experienced that.” Another challenge was SAE’s. Teachers all knew they should be exposing students to Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) Programs, but this tended to be the third circle of the Total Agricultural Education Program Model that simply fell off their already very full plates. For Crystal, she did not realize she had overlooked SAE’s until section day, “I was at selection day, it just like hit me like I didn't do any proficiencies, any state degree, I didn't do any of that. So, I was just like, oh my god I feel like a terrible teacher.”

During the second quarter of the year, the teachers had become aware of the *agriculture content and/or delivery* they lacked and were working to grow in those areas, Hank said he was working to “fill the void of content that I’m not as familiar with by using outside resources or

asking for help.” Others were experiencing more challenges related to how to deliver content. Sophia talked about using a lot of PowerPoints and that was not working so they were looking for other ideas, she said, “when we just sit there and do notes, yeah, it is boring but I try to explain to them, to that you got to get through it.”

The teachers were constantly seeking a better *work/life balance* and for this group of teachers, doing so was especially hard around November and March when they experienced a mid-semester slump in both the fall and spring semesters. By the end of the first quarter, they had identified it as a problem and were seeking solutions, Clare said “most times I try to leave here no later than 7 p.m.” Crystal said “I don’t do anything school related Friday [night] or Saturday but starting noon on Sunday I check back in.” When they did take time for their friends and family, they felt guilty when they returned to school because they were not as prepared as they wanted to be. The breaks in the school year helped with this challenge, Claudia said “over the Christmas break is a lot of life and not much work so that helped with balance.” It is not just physically being at work, but also the toll it took on their thoughts, Crystal said “I laid awake last night thinking of all the things I have to do because my mind wouldn’t shut off.”

### **Program Structure needed in Year 1**

Components needed in an induction program based on the experience of this group of beginning agriculture teachers in their first year include extensive *feedback*. Teachers were craving feedback, the profession should establish ways for a teacher to get reliable feedback on all aspects of their positions (classroom, FFA, and SAE). The teachers were grasping for any measure they could find, and the primary measure provided was CDE success, Crystal said, “We got sixth in poultry again as an A-team with all my returners. And so, we didn’t do worse than last year with their last teacher.” Clare was complimented by a parent during fruit pick-up, a



mother said, “it was the most organized fruit pick-up ever” and this compliment was very motivating to the teacher. Finally, Hank, Wendy and Paige all talked about getting new students into the program and how they also viewed that as positive feedback. These examples show they receive so little feedback, they are holding on tight to anything they can find. For many reasons, administrators were not providing the type of feedback they sought on classroom performance and there were no measures or accountability for SAEs.

The teachers needed and utilized both informal and formal *mentoring* - beginning teachers need a mentoring resource within their school district and within their FFA District and most also identified a peer to go to for support and encouragement. Rather than a single designated mentor, they were seeking multiple individuals to serve different roles. A mentor for agricultural education (often related to their FFA district) made it easier to connect because they saw them regularly, Hank said “he and I spoke at land judging and we spent about 30 minutes talking on the subject of outside (shop) projects and he gave me some very truthful advice.” Early on, the beginning teachers reached out to their former cooperating teachers, but as the year went on, they were more likely to reach out to an agriculture teacher in their district at an event. There was also a need for a mentor to help understand the processes and procedures of the school (located in the same building and with a common available time such as a lunch or planning period was key to a productive relationship). This quote from Crystal also identifies why the mentors should be in a common district, “Today we just had our district meeting and I guess you just – every time we meet up you get a lot of new ideas, so I guess I would say I’m still not being afraid to ask those questions.” Finally, they utilized peers to help with idea generation and to measure their successes and challenges against those of someone with a similar background and

experience. Within this group of teachers there existed peer pairs of which both parties talked about reaching out to their peer for advice and support.

The beginning teachers thrived when surrounded by an agricultural education *support system* in addition to mentoring. This group of teachers engaged in statewide agricultural education specific professional development because they were seeking the connection with other current and beginning teachers who could relate to their unique experiences. The teachers were sponges for new information, they engaged with the professional development and provided multiple examples of how they applied it in their classrooms once they returned home. Programs that further incentivized attendance at agricultural education professional development should be fostered because no matter the motivation for attending they gained tools that were highly impactful to their classroom when they returned. Beginning teachers need to be connected with their peers and exposed regularly to professional development. Claudia reflected on her time at the Ag Ed Symposium, “I just see all my classmates again and then other teachers to get to know more resources that I can use in my classroom for the rest of the year.”

Individuals providing mentorship and support to beginning teachers should know this group of teachers experienced multiple highs and lows throughout their first year. Although they each had a unique journey, collectively they started with very positive attitudes, describing the beginning of the year as “exciting.” However, after returning from the National FFA Convention, experiencing parent-teacher conferences, and engaging with fall fundraising events, they became “overwhelmed.” The fall and winter breaks provided time for more balance in their lives and they began the second semester feeling “rejuvenated.” Clare reflected back thinking “with wrapping up this semester, like, I’ve spent half a year with these kids, and they are mine.” However, by the end of February they had FFA events, National FFA Week Celebrations,

applications due, parent-teacher conferences demanding their time, and this quickly took its toll on them. The spring became chaotic as the entire school seemed to be experiencing an increase in activity with events happening every day and their schedules taking them out of the classroom frequently. Claudia said, “So just trying to stay on top of everything and meet all the deadlines that you have to and keeping kids caught up in school for when they are gone for classes and stuff.” Some teachers were not able to come out of the spring “slump” while others recovered to celebrate the end of the semester. Hank said, “We have students gone all of the time and we have accomplished a lot and looking at all the ideas that I have and would have like to have done it just has to wait until next year.” At the end of the year, they were reflective, they knew the areas they wanted to grow in and set clear goals for what they would accomplish over the summer to help them be more successful in the coming year. Support provided to beginning teachers should consider both their “in the moment” needs based on the academic year and their overall well-being and attitude toward teaching.

### **Awareness related to Year 1**

Individuals who support beginning teachers should be aware of their experiences that may not directly relate to professional development to have a greater understanding of the teachers they are supporting. For this group of teachers, there was an increased interest in taking on *additional responsibilities* in the school. Hank said, “we started basketball, that would be one more thing to balance, I think I just need to know that time is set aside for basketball and anything else that I need to do...I am going to have to find time.” Teachers and administrators need to consider the long-term impact of spreading their limited time as a beginning teacher too thin. The type of responsibilities should also be considered, teachers who took on minor coaching roles, for example a middle school assistant coach saw the increased relationship

building they were seeking without major consequences to personal and professional development. When teachers reflected on why they accepted additional duties, Wendy described it like this “they asked me to do assistant track coach... I figured the one thing that I got out of it is that I can get to other kids that I won’t have in class to recruit them for my classes.” Similarly, Crystal said “I love track and the kids seem really positive about me joining the team because they have – they want a girl track coach.” They did not take on these responsibilities for money, it was for relationships and to grow their agriculture programs.

When working with beginning teachers, it is important to remember what the *life of a young professional* entails. They are getting married, having children, relocating significant others and/or spouses, and they are still engaged with their family and perhaps farming operations, but they usually do not live there to do so. They are living in a community where they may only know individuals through the school. They are working to meet the professional development and licensure requirements by the state, and many are contemplating their next professional move, will they engage with graduate school or consider a different profession in the future? During her first semester of teaching, Wendy was already contemplating her master’s degree options and planning ways to pay off college loans.

## **Content-related needs in Year 2**

In year two, the teachers had a greater understanding of their FFA and classroom roles and were more willing to engage in growing the *SAE* circle. Claudia said “I need to start picking up on my *SAE* part. That was easily my weakest last year, but I realize that and this year I am going to do a lot more with it, like schedule some visits.” The teachers who were trained in “*SAE for All*,” talked about different tools and a new outlook on *SAE* when compared to their peers. They felt like *SAE* was more practical and possible to implement in their program.

The teachers in year two were more purposeful and *increased parent/community communication*. The teachers more readily reached out to parents in both formal and casual ways about student performance. They were also more open to parent involvement in the program and invited them to events and/or created parent-specific communication about the program. When Helen moved into a new community, she hosted an event including parents because she knew this was an area she wanted to improve upon after her first-year teaching experience. Hank said, “I think this year I can be a little bit more honest about what I need from them [community]. Last year it was just a little bit overwhelming...but this year I think I know who I can be honest with.” To increase her communication with the community, Crystal said “I have an FFA Facebook so I’ve been trying to really utilize that...so it’s really helped.” Hank made an interesting observation that the support from the community had a direct relationship to the success of athletic teams, to a level there was an increased investment in fruit and meat sales by FFA when the football team was more successful.

There was an impact on beginning teachers who felt *separated* in some way. For example, having lunch with "other teachers," being split between high school and middle responsibilities and faculty, or physical separation because of their facility locations. When possible, barriers to the school and other faculty need to be removed for beginning teachers. Hank described his separation, “the fact that I am 300 feet away from the closest classroom, and I am in a completely separate building, I find that I really unless I need something from the main building I am not up there.”

### **Program Structure needed in Year 2**

The teachers who moved schools between year one and two were not formally assigned a new *mentor* at their new school. Instead, these teachers tried to seek out their own mentors and

parents to provide support and answer questions. Even those who remained in the same school did not necessarily have a mentor, Wendy said “my FCS teacher (mentor) retired, so I don’t have her anymore. I don’t blame her, but I don’t know who I talk to.” This shows there is a need for a school-based mentor for transitioning teachers, the support needed is largely related to the school processes and culture. For the teachers who continued into their second year at the same school, they continued to use a school-based mentor, but it may not have been their “official mentor” due to the teacher connecting with another teacher better or their formal mentor leaving. The teachers still expressed a need for school-based mentoring, although they used it significantly less than in year one. Although the teachers were never assigned a formal agriculture teacher as a mentor, they readily discussed using their go-to person in agriculture education who often shifted from their cooperating teacher to a trusted mentor within their FFA district. They still utilized peer mentors as well. Hank described what he was looking for in a mentor during his second year, "It really didn't get in depth and it really wasn't a lot of value in the mentoring process. So, I think that the – having someone on a more personal level within my school system that I would consider as a mentor was much more valuable to me. And we did not have set questions, or we didn't have set schedules when we were going to meet, it was extremely informal. But I think that at the same time it was more valuable in the case that it was very down to earth and comfortable to do so, so that was my experience."

### **Awareness related to Year 2**

We know beginning teachers struggle with work/life balance and time management. However, due to their lack of personal demands (perhaps not being married or having children) they volunteer or are *asked to do more* in the school when compared to some veteran teachers. For this group of beginning teachers, five of the seven in year two took on significant additional

responsibilities in addition to agricultural education/FFA in their schools. This decision was still based on them having positive experiences in dance/sports/etc. in high school and thought it could help them get to know more students and get them out of their classrooms. However, they readily talked about how it also took away from their time to be the teacher and FFA advisor they would like to be. Claudia said, “now that volleyball is over, I find a lot more time to make really fun lessons.” We should exercise caution when we ask more of our beginning teachers, we need to give them time to get established as a professional before adding more to their plates. These beginning teachers were not yet comfortable saying no and recognized they often took on more than they should.

Beginning teachers in year two need support, but it should be customized to meet their self-identified needs. Exercises that walk them through setting goals for growth and identifying resources will help the teachers grow in the areas they selected. The teachers should be reminded of the many roles they have as an agriculture teacher and should conduct a self-evaluation on the balance in both their program among the three circles and their balance related to work and life to ensure they are a quality teacher who will remain in the profession long term.

### **Content-related needs in Year 3**

In the third year, teachers could identify student motivation issues and they were challenged to determine how to develop the “desire to learn.” *Student motivation* was a major challenge in all areas of their jobs as teachers, and they sought strategies to motivate students in the classroom, to be engaged with FFA events at a higher level and to establish SAE programs. Claudia said, “I had some students that they are really lazy and they just like, I’ll give them directions or I’ll tell them something and not even five seconds later they ask me a question about what I just said.” The teachers felt like they know how to help and prepare students, but

students were not motivated to engage. Student management was rarely an issue, Wendy said, “I definitely noticed that I have more confidence in myself... you don’t give them any chance to do anything [related to student management].” Clare described this lack of motivation in the classroom as “disheartening when they are like ‘why are we learning this?’ Or ‘why are we doing this’ or ‘why aren’t we down at the shop today?’” Paige noticed less participation in FFA events and Helen said, “I’ve had some challenges in my shop classes with student participation.”

The teachers were clearly more experienced in creating or finding *curriculum*, tweaking it and then adding to it because they knew tools to make it more student centered and engaging. They were moving through the content at a faster pace in year three, Claudia said “I was like way ahead of schedule compared to last year.” Clare’s focus was on “one class that I’m definitely revamping is welding one and two next year.” The teachers were able to identify the types of curriculum they needed. Some needed content to which they could add their personal touch, while others needed creative ideas to enhance the content knowledge they possessed.

The teachers made a concerted effort to increase communication with the *community*. Methods used included newspaper articles, newsletters, or social media. This effort was immediately impactful by supportive comments, community volunteers and increased engagement with community activities. Claudia said, “we’ve been putting more stuff in the newspaper...so more community members are seeing our success there and everyone is always so positive.” However, there is also a drawback to the increased attention, Helen said “they were like, ‘can you do this for us,’ or ‘could you do that for us?’ Then the springtime is just as busy as usual so kind of makes it difficult to cram more stuff into what we already have planned.”

There was significantly less discussion about their personal involvement in the community – a topic that was discussed frequently in the first two years. Perhaps they were now



comfortable with their level of engagement. It was more difficult for teachers in multi-teacher programs to get connected with the community as the community contacts the teacher they know; this was especially hard for teachers who do not reside in the community. Paige said, “I don't live in the community. It's really hard....I think that's probably always going to be the challenge until we live closer and there are more (connections).”

As demographics changed for this group of teachers, *work/life integration* also evolved. Early in the year there was a lot more work than life, however, data were not collected over the summer and there could have been more "life" in the summer than there is now. Later in the year, there were examples of working through work/life balance challenges through some integration, for example, inviting the family along during greenhouse sales. During the month of April several examples arose of spouses also stepping up and helping with the jobs normally done by the teacher, they too also knew that it would balance back out in the summer months. Helen said, “It’s just, I don’t know like early mornings, I’m seeing that a lot, my husband should feel neglected, but I plan to just make up for that in the summer months.” Some teachers were more comfortable with work/life balance via compartmentalization while others were more satisfied with a work/life integration plan.

*Professional development* was readily sought out by this group of teachers, but it appeared to come at a cost. Many were highly engaged with professional development over the summer but did not ensure there was an adequate break. Clare said, “I was only in town for 17 days” after balancing both professional and personal travel over the summer so much that she started the school year “burnt out from the summer.” Claudia completed three separate professional development events after her second year and said “I am taking this summer off; I have got to get my thesis done and then moving ...I needed a little break from PD.”

### **Program Structure needed in Year 3**

The teachers could readily identify what they did not know related to content and/or program management. While they did not feel the need for a traditional *mentor*, they needed “go-to” people for the specific questions they had. The teachers wanted to work with beginning and experienced teachers to exchange ideas on specific areas of growth they had identified to benefit them as a teacher and their program. The teachers were making decisions based on their work/life balance to give up some additional responsibilities and make room for family. Crystal said, “on the dance team side, I have to think about what I want to do on that, if I am going to do it (next year).” They shared less need for formal and frequent events and activities but a desire for deeper discussion on specific topics. For example, Paige was seeking mentors to specifically help with “middle school and interactive notebooks” while Clare left state FFA Convention with goals to get students on stage and said, “you know we are going to reach out to [ag teacher] and hopefully he can help us get through the whole process.”

### **Awareness related to Year 3**

The teachers in their third year no longer felt like novice teachers, but they were not sure they were ready to serve as formal mentors yet. They shared a desire to “give back” to the profession but were unsure as to how they could do so. They felt they could relate well with beginning teachers, having recently experienced their first year, and have some experiences they would like to share. However, they readily realized they still have a lot to learn as well.

### **Focus Group Findings**

There were components from the research method design that the teachers felt had a direct impact on their professional development, specifically the monthly interviews and the annual focus groups. Components like these should be included in a professional development

program.

When reflecting on the monthly phone calls, the teachers found them to be very valuable, especially because they were predictable, the teachers found comfort in knowing what would be asked and appreciated the “forced reflection” that they knew they needed, but would not do on their own.

In year one, Claudia said,

I think it was really good in helping me reflect on what I was doing. I'd look at my planner and see 'Oh crap! I have a call meeting today at 1 o'clock' and then I'd start thinking about the questions that I knew you were going to ask and started thinking about what I've done for the past month and it got me, you know, realizing 'Oh yeah, I did this. I still need to work on this' and you guys pushed us to reflect, you will think about what we were doing and so us doing this has helped me to continue to do that.

The appreciation of the monthly conversations continued through year two, again referencing the consistency in the questions was valuable. Helen said, “having you call once a month at the end of the day and like ask me the same questions...it was kind of nice to have just a debrief.” She valued the fact the phone calls because the researcher understood agricultural education.

In year three, Crystal said she valued the outsider perspective and the long-term support.

I don't think I would have maybe gotten through my first two years of teaching with just all the challenges I got through. So, I'm actually really bummed that this is over, but I definitely think you having an outsider perspective helped me get through my first two years especially not having an FFA background. I knew I always could look forward to

those phone calls and get the information I needed or tools and so I was really glad I stuck with this and stuck to teaching for the three years I have been a part with you because I think you know definitely I was running for the hills this time last year to get out, just because I had such a terrible experience.”

There were mixed feelings on whether it was important for a site visit to be a part the experience. Clare said, "I don't really think the [site visit] really impacted any of my responses,” however, she went on to say there was value in the informal meeting with the administrator. “it made me feel good when I walked up with you to my administrator and he was like 'Oh are you sending student teachers to us already' ...so it just felt nice, like he was totally on board.” In contrast, Hank said, "I think for me having two different buildings that I physically instruct in, it was kind of nice, it enabled me to be a little more honest about some of the challenges that I have been facing."

The focus group allowed the teachers to reflect as a group, exchange ideas, and share challenges and solutions. Clare said, "I really like this conference call because we don't see each other all the time like we did when we were in Block. It's something to hear everyone's experiences and how different they were, and it has been actually kind of really cool. So, I don't know, getting together more often would be really nice."

Based on the feedback provided by the teachers, monthly phone calls, focus groups and site visits are components that should be considered as part of a robust induction program. The teachers shared value in the long-term nature of the program. An induction program should not be limited to one year or one mode of delivery in order to meet the unique needs of each teacher.

## Conclusions and Implications for Practice

There is a need for a comprehensive beginning teacher program that spans the first three years is unique in content and structure in each of the three years to best meet the needs of beginning teachers. Induction facilitators should consider including the topics outlined in table 5.1, but it is important to note this is not an all-inclusive list. Rather, these themes emerged based on uniform feedback from the study participants. Individual teachers in this group identified other areas of content they needed and sought support from their mentors. Induction programs should incorporate a mechanism that allows input from individual induction teachers to identify the specific areas of support they needed.

**Table 5.1**

*Suggested Content to be Delivered by Year*

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Obtaining supplies and equipment	SAE	Student motivation
Student management	Parent communication	New ideas
Balancing and prioritizing FFA, SAE and classroom	Isolation	Communicating with the broader community
Agriculture content and/or delivery resources	Evaluating additional responsibilities	Work/life balance
Work/life balance		

Induction programs should focus on a comprehensive professional development program, rather than a series of events that would appear to be unrelated “snapshot” activities. Mentoring should be a component of the program but mentoring itself does not meet the needs of the beginning agriculture teacher. The program should be more formal and structured in year one and become less structured and more “self-guided” in years two and three.

## Induction Program Needs in Year 1 - Content

Teachers needed coaching to identify all of their *supply and facility needs*, prioritize them, and then have a conversation with their administration on a short and long term plan for how they will work together, over time, to improve the facilities and obtain the needed supplies, equipment and professional development training.

*Student management* resources need to be available on an “as needed” basis as the type and nature of student management challenges shifted throughout the year. Teachers should be provided support on setting expectations for one-to-one technology at the beginning of their first year. Beginning teachers should be supported in setting clear expectations and practice scenarios where they hold students accountable to those expectations.

Induction programs must support the development of the *entire professional* and provide measures of success and growth opportunities in all areas of their job responsibilities. Those attending National FFA Convention could use a “checklist” to reference, so they are sure to get all of the details of that major event taken care of since it happens so quickly. FFA fundraising took a significant amount of time during the second academic quarter whether it was fruit and meat sales, concession stands, or other events. Beginning teachers need support on managing major events and activities like these. Teachers know they should be establishing SAE’s with their students, but a lack of time and student interest that prevented them from developing, so manageable strategies for making realistic progress with SAE in year one should be considered.

The teachers could readily identify the *content or delivery* areas where they want to grow. They needed help identifying resources to help fill the voids they have identified and provided time to ensure it happens.

Beginning agriculture teachers need to be coached on setting reasonable expectations for *work/life balance* and ways to maximize their time to provide more balance to prevent burn-out. This group of teachers employed a variety of methods to establish work/life balance from work/life integration to compartmentalization. The teachers need resources on methods to establish work/life balance and then time to try them and see what methods offer the best fit for them. This is especially important to address before they experience the “mid semester slump.”

### **Structure Needs in Year 1**

The beginning teachers should be brought together to create a *community* (virtually or physically) at least once per semester (no more than once per quarter) to confirm they are not the only one struggling with the challenges and most of all to focus on helping them return to the classroom with solutions to specific challenges they are facing.

*Professional development* should be provided strategically before beginning teachers may experience the mid semester slumps of November and March. The teachers could be coached to think through the activities to come and have a plan for how they will manage them to reduce surprises and set a goal for work/life balance. While we cannot prevent teachers from feeling overwhelmed, we can help them strategize to make the experience less stressful. The professional development or induction system should provide a trusted mentor to observe the beginning teacher during their first semester to provide *feedback* – not to evaluate, but to support their development as a teacher in all aspects of their career.

First-year teachers should be guided in identifying *three mentors*, an agriculture teacher (within FFA district for ease of meeting and the ability to answer district level questions and provide casual interaction at events), a teacher within their school to help them learn school culture, policies and procedures, and a peer mentor with who the can exchange resources with an

helps the teacher understand they are not alone and their experiences are not unique to them. There should be more frequent meetings at the beginning of the year with their school-based mentor and less needed during the second semester.

At least one of the mentors here should be trained to conduct formal monthly communication via phone using a semi-structured format through *guided reflection*. For example, mentors could call the teacher once a month and ask the following questions:

- How are you?
- What went well this month?
- What were you challenged by this month?
- What are you looking forward to in the month to come?
- What are you concerned about in the month to come?
- If specific areas were not discussed (FFA, SAE, Classroom, School/Community, etc.) directed follow up questions should be asked.
- The final question should be, let's talk again in a month, what day/times works best for a call? Mentors should send a reminder via text or e-mail 1-2 days ahead of the call as a reminder.

The teachers in this study appreciated the predictability and frequency of the monthly communication. The act of seeing the call on their calendar prompted reflection to the questions they knew would be asked and forced reflection on accomplishments and challenges of the last month and month to come. Unlike a "cold call" there was time for the beginning teachers to prepare for the discussion because they knew what would be asked. This activity forced them to focus on BOTH the accomplishments and challenges of the last month AND to think ahead to the month to come. There were times the teachers had simply not thought about the events that were coming up and what they needed to do to prepare prior to that question prompt. Ending the phone call with scheduling the next conversation ensured the predictability and stability they appreciated throughout the year.

Teachers need resources during times they cannot simply "call for help." Therefore, "*in the moment resources*" should be available at a common location where beginning teachers can



obtain information on topics when they need them. This could include State and National FFA processes such as how to complete the FFA roster, and Career Clusters Pathway Applications. Student management, student motivation, and best teaching practices could also be included. These topics should be covered in professional development, but teachers get so much information at once they need a resource to go to for “in the moment” needs.

*Peer meetings* should be planned (they can be in-person, virtual or a combination). Peer meetings allowed the teachers to hear the successes and challenges of their peers and the mentors can provide professional development based on the conversations they had with the beginning teachers. Consider planning these events each academic quarter or semester to ensure predictability and consistency in the beginning teacher support system. All meetings for the year could be scheduled at the beginning of the school year so the teachers can line up substitute teachers and transportation for the entire program at the beginning of the school year. Teachers who already have a substitute teacher and transportation lined up are far more likely to attend the event during their already busy schedule. If they are not pre-planned at the beginning of the year it is much easier for the beginning teacher to feel they are too busy for professional development when the invitation comes, however, if the plans are already in place, they are more likely to engage and attend.

*Feedback on teaching* should be provided to the beginning teacher between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> week of teaching. This timeline allows them to get comfortable, but also become aware of their challenges and where they want to improve. The feedback could be in person by having a trusted professional (preferably one they have had a relationship with or at least prior contact with) visit the beginning teacher’s school. The visit could also include a tour of the agricultural education facilities, a meeting with the teacher and an administrator of their choice and an observation of at

least one class. The visit should last for a half to a full day. An alternative to this suggestion could be the use of video technology, the teacher could record and comment on a lesson and then provide it to a mentor for feedback. Regardless of the method, the focus of the observation is on growing the young professional, not evaluation or assessment. Although when the beginning teachers were asked “how impactful was the site visit?” their responses were mixed, some feeling it was very helpful and others said it did not impact the monthly conversations. The goal of the visit was to gather data, not provide feedback. The teachers were very consistent in their thirst for feedback and identified the only measure they had as FFA competition results, therefore a lack of feedback on classroom and SAE components of their program was identified. The on-site visits should focus on all aspects of the agriculture teachers’ roles and duties and provide feedback in the SAE and classroom areas they are not getting feedback on.

### **Program Content in Year 2**

To encourage the teachers to increase the focus on *SAE*, SAE for All training should be provided to all beginning teachers. Consider delivering the training in the summer between year one and two, after they have taught for a year and are feeling more comfortable with the classroom and FFA roles.

Consider encouraging beginning to establish a method for parent and community *communication* earlier. For teachers in year two, they should be coached on different ways they can increase parent and community communication to better utilize volunteers in the agriculture program.

Mentors should talk with beginning teachers to see if a feeling of *isolation* exists. This feeling may be able to be overcome with purposeful meetings or by making goals to go into the main school building during their planning period. It is important for beginning agriculture

teachers to purposefully engage in the main building if they are separated, this will foster relationships with other faculty and staff members and have a positive impact on the agriculture program as well.

Make mentor teachers aware of how to evaluate *additional responsibilities*, and coach beginning teachers through determining when to say “yes” or “no.” They should also be coached on how to provide a professional “no” response to an opportunity that reflects their thought process.

## **Structure in Year 2**

Second year teachers need a mentor within their school, if there was a “formal” mentor in year one and they had a positive experience and are still at the school, they should be encouraged to continue the relationship or consider seeking their own trusted individual to serve as their mentor if that is more comfortable for them. Beginning teachers need a school-based mentor in year two, especially if they transition between schools. The teachers need a mentor in the agricultural education arena, but their needs from the mentor are less formal and the individual could be self-selected. Continued communication with a peer mentor is valuable to their professional development. One of the mentors should continue monthly guided reflection with them, but other mentor activities can be on an as needed basis.

There needs to be a *community of young agricultural education professionals gathering* (physical or virtual), but this could include both second- and third-year teachers as their needs are similar. Consider meetings twice a year. Strategically plan the meetings to avoid the busiest times of year so they have time to think, reflect and apply new ideas. They need regular reminders they are not the “only one” who may be feeling overwhelmed, to be able to compare

successes and challenges, and collaboratively brainstorm solutions. The “*as needed resources*” should continue to be available to them.

### **Content in Year 3**

Beginning teachers, especially in year three, are seeking new ways to *motivate* and engage students and need professional development and strategies to utilize at the beginning of the year. They are also ready to *try new things*. The teachers have a solid understanding of their skills and student interests and are seeking quality professional development to add new experiences to the program and curriculum.

Beginning teachers need a strategy to *communicate with the broader community*. They should carefully consider requests from the community and be strategic about opportunities with which they do and do not engage. Teachers who are in multi-teacher programs need to be supported to be more strategic about getting involved with the community since it may not happen as easily/naturally in these situations.

Beginning teachers benefit from being exposed to multiple models/solutions to *work/life balance* or integration. There is not a “right way,” it is finding the best way for them and those close to them. Related to this, they should be advised to engage with specific and purposeful summer *professional development* but be aware to not overdo it which could contribute to burn out.

### **Program Structure in Year 3**

*A community of young agricultural education professionals* should continue through the third year and can be alongside the second-year teachers. Third year teachers need mentoring in a different form - not necessarily an individual *mentor* but rather a variety of contacts who can hone in on the topics with which they need support. Teachers in their third year are ready to *give*

*back to the profession* in informal and small ways. They have recent experiences allowing them to relate to first year teachers and utilizing them in small ways will grow them to be future mentors. They could be utilized in the first-year teacher program in small, specific, purposeful ways.

One mentor should continue monthly guided reflection exercises with the third-year teachers. Other mentoring may be very specific to a topic or skill and they could be aided in finding content and skill-specific mentors that meet their needs. Encourage teachers to continue peer mentoring. Gather feedback on the induction program experience to learn how we can continue to best meet the needs of beginning teachers in the future.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Research should be gathered on current and future induction programs and beginning teacher needs. Fessler and Christensen (1992) and Moir (1999) show how teachers move through phases throughout their career, but do those phases withstand the test of time? Facilitators of novice teacher programs need to obtain feedback on content and structure needs as the demographics of beginning teachers change. This research should be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the question “how do beginning teachers want to be supported in their first year?” to learn about the best delivery methods of content as this too will likely change and evolve as new technology options become available and new generations of teachers want to consume information in different ways.

In response to Sutchter et al.’s (2016) finding that states those teachers who are not fully prepared to teach, perhaps non-traditionally certified, leave at the highest rate similar research needs to be done to determine their unique needs since this project was limited to traditionally certified teachers. For example, supporters of beginning teachers need to know the content and

structure desired by teachers who have added an agriculture endorsement to an already existing teaching certificate. Related, facilitators need to understand the support requested by agriculture industry experienced individuals who are completing a teaching endorsement in agriculture, perhaps while they are teaching full time.

Due to the fact this was a broad study, there is much to be learned about accomplishments and challenges related to specific topics such as SAE integration, technology utilization and curriculum resources used. Qualitative studies, over time, that more closely examine specific topics are needed. The prior studies (Figland, 2019; Myers et al., 2010;) supported the findings of this study, but as teachers change, so may their needs therefore this topic needs to remain current in our profession.

Bigger questions exist on the impact of teacher morale. As Ingersoll (2002) reminds us, retaining teachers also has a financial benefit to districts as training new employees is expensive. He suggests that we focus on improving schools through increased salaries, student management, and faculty leadership. There is evidence in this study that staff and administration support effects teacher morale, the extent of the impact and how staff and administration can make a positive impact on agriculture teacher morale need to be answered. Similarly, there may be an impact of community support and engagement on a teacher's success. We need to understand how much community support and engagement is needed for agriculture teachers and the impact of community support on program success. Teacher retention in communities can be impacted by support felt from within the school and the community.

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## **Chapter 6 - A Qualitative Analysis of Agriculture Teacher's Attitude**

### **Toward Teaching: Does Moir's Model Apply?**

#### **Abstract**

*Does Ellen Moir's (1999) Model and phases of first year teacher's attitude towards teaching match the unique experiences of beginning agriculture teachers? 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. Grounded theory guided the data collection and analysis. Based on the individual and collective experiences of the eight teachers, their experiences at the beginning of the year followed a similar path to Moir's work. However, following the mid fall semester "slump" the agriculture teachers in their first, second and third years had a different experience than Moir 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 feeling as more extreme in the monthly interviews but held an overall positive attitude toward teaching when reflecting on the year at the end of each of the three years. Facilitators of novice teacher 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 include conducting a similar study with a more diverse population of teachers in a variety of schools and communities.*

Keywords: novice teachers; beginning teachers; agriculture teachers; mentoring; induction programs; professional development; 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 ask the exact 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 do the same workload as a veteran, (Moir, 2000). In some situations, they may even receive a teaching load with more course preparations or end up with students with increased needs when compared to their peers in education.

The need for teachers nationwide in nearly all subject areas is well documented (Ingersoll, 2002; Sutchter, et al., 2016) as is the shortage of agriculture teachers (Camp, 2002; Foster et al., 2016; Kantorovich, 2010; Smith et al., 2017, 2018, 23019). The solution to teacher shortages lies in both recruitment and retention. Retention will lead to the most immediate response to the issue (Ingersoll, 2002). To increase retention, we must understand the beginning teacher’s experience to develop responsive novice teacher programs that meet their unique needs.

Ellen Moir (1999) 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 outlines the highs and lows in the initial teaching year that teachers may experience. Administrators, mentors, and teachers can benefit from understanding what the beginning teacher might experience as they worked to guide beginning teachers. Following Moir’s work, Rayfield et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study to compare Moir’s theory to beginning agriculture teachers’ experiences. Rayfield found agriculture teachers had a different experience than outlined by Moir, there were highs and lows

in their experience but were 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. In the model, the induction stage focused on the first few years of teaching. This is a time where teachers seek 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) within the beginning agriculture teacher space in their mixed methods study. They found the 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 career but an overall positive experience.

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.” 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 shortages merits attention and understanding of the beginning teacher experiences. This information can then be used to inform state education leaders on how to support induction and early career teachers.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

As part of a larger investigation, this phenomenological collective case study was designed to understand beginning agriculture teachers’ experiences. The specific component addressed in this article sought to understand how beginning agriculture teachers attitudes toward teaching changed throughout their first three years and how experiences compare to the work of Ellen Moir’s (1999) phases of first year teachers attitudes toward teaching. The research was

guided by the following objectives:

1. How do beginning teachers' attitudes toward teaching change throughout the first three years of their teaching career?
2. Do the experiences of the teachers in this collective case study align with the "phases of first-year teachers' attitudes toward teaching" by Ellen Moir (1999)?

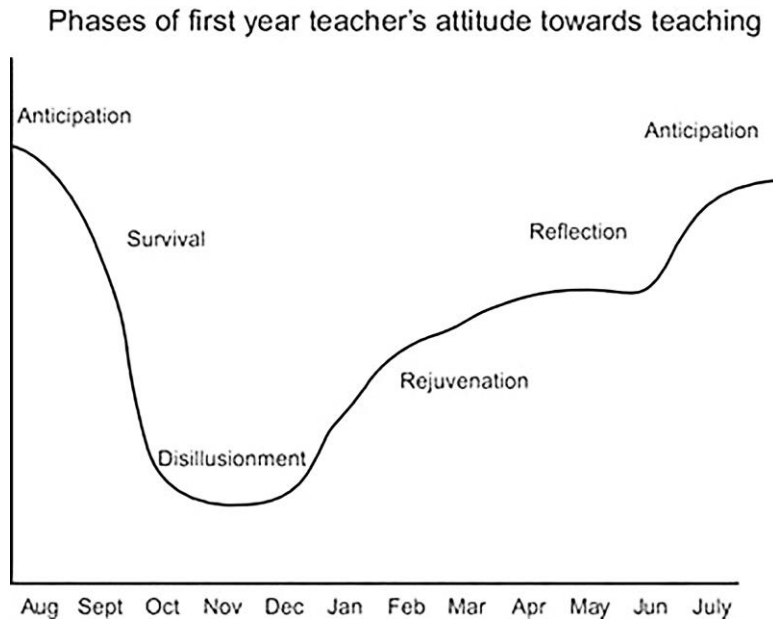
### **Theoretical Framework**

This longitudinal phenomenological grounded theory case study was carefully designed and guided by theory to learn the lived experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017) of beginning agriculture teachers. The study was guided by a phenomenological case study design to fully understand the experiences of the teachers, a longitudinal study was conducted over a three-year time span. A case study design was selected to design the research guided by a clearly bounded system (Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory guided the data analysis.

Moir's (1999) work (Figure 1) was guided by her experience reviewing journals of 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. Moir's work shows beginning teachers' needs are dynamic and complex, lending itself to a qualitative study design to seek to further understand the experiences and interactions beginning teachers face.

#### **Figure 6.1**

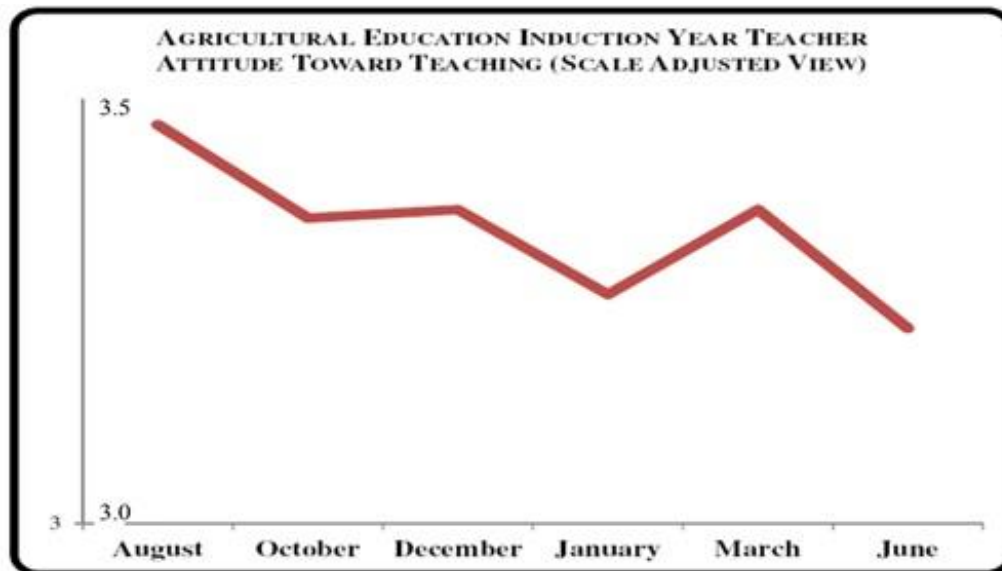
*Phases of First-Year Teacher Attitudes Toward Teaching (Moir, 1999)*



Rayfield, et. al. (2014) analyzed induction year agriculture teachers in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico using a quantitative study. They found minor changes in teachers' attitudes toward teaching, lacking the fluctuation as described by Moir (1999). The teachers had a generally positive attitude toward their career and when their model was adjusted to show changes (Figure 2), the highs and lows were different than Moir (1999) described.

**Figure 6.2**

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



## Methods

This research is guided by constructionist epistemology (Creswell, 2018) within the interpretivism framework. Phenomenology frames the study to seek a bounded system (Creswell, 2018) of individuals who have experienced the defined phenomenon. The participants of this study were graduates of the Kansas State University Agricultural Education program in the mid 2010 decade. Due to the fact the bounded system created a small sample size (Creswell, 2011), everyone within the bounded system was invited to participate in the study eight of whom accepted the invitation. This created the “bounded system” (Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009) of the case study.

The setting of the research was in schools located across Kansas. The schools ranged in enrollment, from small (1A-2A) to moderate (4A) schools as categorized by the Kansas High School Activities Association. The communities in which the schools were situated ranged in population from 414-3,983, all of which were considered either “urban clusters” or “rural” by the United States Department of Agriculture definitions (2019).

The initial eight participants included one male and seven females ranging in age from

22-25 years old, all participants were white. All the teachers were either in single teacher programs (6) or multi-teacher programs (2). Seven of the teachers transitioned into a new community to teach and one taught in their hometown and in the school from which they graduated. Only one participant was married when they began their first year of teaching and two participants had one child each. One participant did not have high school agricultural education experience. To protect the autonomy of the individuals, defining demographics are presented collectively (Creswell, 2018).

Demographics of the teachers changed each year, in year two of the study there were seven participants. One female teacher left the study due to the time commitments but, remained teaching in the same school. This left six females and one male. Two teachers transitioned positions within agricultural education in the state (one going from a single teacher program to a multi-teacher and one from a two-teacher program to a single) which changed the program demographics from year one. In year two, there were two teachers in multi-teacher programs (one in a two-teacher program and one in a three-teacher program) and five teachers in one teacher programs. Two teachers were married. Two teachers had one child each.

In the final year of the study, there were six teachers. The male teacher left teaching after year two to work in production agriculture. In year three one teacher transitioned schools to return to her hometown. One teacher was in a multi-teacher program that added an additional teacher during her third year, one remained in a two-teacher program and the remaining four participants were all leading one teacher programs. Of these teachers, two were married and one had a child.

Multiple sources of information were collected throughout the three-year case study (Creswell, 2018). The study began with a ½ day visit to the school scheduled between the 6th



and 8th week of the academic calendar of their school. The visit included a tour of the school and agriculture program, introductions with their administrator and observation of the teacher teaching and an interview. Within the parameters of the study, the teacher selected the day, what classes were observed, and administrator to increase their comfort level during the visit. Data collected during the visit included photographs of the agriculture facilities, a documented observation of one class and a recorded 30-minute semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009). The same interview protocol and questions were used throughout the year. The interview began with asking them “what is going on in your life?” and the second question asked them to “describe your feelings toward teaching in one word” followed by questions that asked them to reflect on their successes and challenges both overall and specifically related to the agricultural education program. The visit concluded with scheduling the next phone interview for four weeks later. An e-mail or text was sent one day prior to the scheduled interview as a reminder. The monthly phone interviews continued through the academic year. Year one of the study concluded with the participants completing a two page reflection guide, the first page asked them to reflect on their successes and challenges of their year and the second page asked them to chart the highs and lows they remember experiencing in their attitude toward teaching. The final event for the year was a 1-hour semi-structured (Merriam, 2009) focus group that was held online via Zoom. The information presented in this article was guided by the monthly interview specifically their responses to the question “describe your feels toward teaching in one word,” the yearly reflection guides and the yearly focus groups.

The reflection guide and focus group addressing year one happened in early August and concluded data collection for year one. In year two, monthly interviews started in August during the first week of classes and happened monthly through the end of the academic year. Depending

on the calendar, teachers were engaged with nine or ten interviews depending on when the May interview landed (whether they were still in school). The two teachers who changed schools between year one and two received another site visit following the same protocol of visit one. At the conclusion of year two the reflection guide was provided to the teachers and they were asked to complete and submit it prior to the focus group meeting schedule for June directly following their second year.

In year three, monthly interviews resumed in August and were scheduled for the first week of classes happening every four weeks for nine or ten months depending on the calendar. One teacher transitioned programs between year two and three and a site visit was scheduled using the same protocol as year one. Year three concluded with teachers responding to an individual reflection guide and the final focus group was held the first week of June following their third year of teaching.

Questions were designed using the protocol for conducting interviews by Creswell (2018) and literature informed the types of questions in the monthly interview protocol. The question “describe your feelings toward teaching in one word” was inspired by Moir’s (1999) work to see how they felt at a specific point in time, and helped “warm-up” the participants for the interview (Creswell, 2018). Questions about their successes and challenges sought to understand their lived experiences and how they felt about teaching as a profession. Research by Boone & Boone (2007) and Myers et al. (2010) informed the questions related to their roles in agricultural education. The final questions about how they utilized formal and informal mentors was guided by the work of Tummons et al. (2016). The semi-structured interview guide was specifically created to learn about their attitudes toward teaching, their lived experiences related to successes and challenges and specific areas related to agricultural education and their interaction with

mentors. The interview guide, protocol and informed consent were reviewed by an agricultural education professor prior to being sent to the Internal Review Board (IRB). After IRB approval was obtained a pilot interview was conducted with a local, early career agriculture teacher who was not part of the study.

Rigor was established by dedicating time in the study, by gathering extensive data, ensuring reflexivity, and trustworthiness (Tracy, 2010). Data for the three-year study yielded eleven in-person teacher observations, 29 photos, nineteen reflection guides, three video focus group transcripts, and 129 individual audio interview transcripts. As Creswell (2018) identified in systematic procedures of grounded theory, observations and documentation are collected but often not used, which was the case in this study. Data analysis focused on specific portions of data collected from the monthly interviews, reflection guides and focus groups. The audio and video transcripts were transcribed. The transcripts were loaded into NVivo 12 to sort and organize the individual transcripts, codes, and reflective journaling. Automatic coding by the NVivo program was not utilized.

Grounded theory informed the data analysis first by positioning the research as a part of the research process by creating a subjectivity statement identifying their prior experiences and relationships with the participants. Reflexivity was exercised through extensive journaling which was used to track ideas that informed the process, the data and analysis processes happened together (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) by constant comparative technique (Creswell, 2018) which included data coming from a variety of sources shared by the same individuals. Guided by Corbin and Strauss's (1990) work, systematic procedures were utilized to understand the beginning teachers' attitude towards teaching over time. Corbin & Strass (2015) guided the open, axial and selective coding process. An extensive audit trail (Creswell, 2018) was utilized in

NVivo providing structure and organization to the journaling documenting reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006) that happened during and after interviews and throughout the data and analysis processes. Trustworthiness was ensured through a researcher subjectivity statement that positioned the researcher as a former high school agriculture teacher and University faculty member for the participants in the study. Furthermore, coding was provided to a colleague for review. Triangulation (Tracy, 2010) was utilized throughout data analysis to compare the information provided in monthly interviews to the individual reflection journal and focus group transcripts at the end of each year. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Additional analyses were made on the term the teachers identified that described their feelings toward teaching in one word each month over the three years. In an attempt to understand how their attitudes toward teaching changed throughout the year, and how that compared to their annual reflection guide, the terms they identified each month were specifically coded based on the nature of the word and the experiences they described with it . It is important to note, some terms were coded in two different categories and the context of how they presented the term was analyzed for 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 3.3. To create a visual representation of the teacher’s attitudinal changes, numeric vales were connected to the terms to visually represent the attitudinal shifts over time, the numeric values are also presented in Table 3.3.

Table 6.1

*Terms Representing the Teachers Attitude Toward Teaching and Coding Summary*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>Numeric Value</b>	3	2	1

<b>Terms</b>	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		

The individual reflection journals guided the teachers to reflect on their year, their successes and challenges as well as anticipating the year to come. The teachers were asked to reflect on the highs and lows of their year teaching and to identify specific points of the year when they recalled their attitude toward teaching shifting and what factors contributed to that shift. 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 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) describes 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 the individuals and this group of teachers and is not intended to be generalized but can prompt research in the future and contribute to theory.

## **Results**

The first objective of this research was to understand how the teachers described their attitudes toward teaching throughout the first three years of their career. During monthly interviews, the teachers were asked to “describe your feelings towards teaching in one word.” These terms were then coded to be “positive” “neutral” or “negative.” Utilizing the words provided by the teachers and the coding utilized by the researcher, the teachers’ attitudes toward teaching over time are displayed in Table 1. This information helped form the initial individual and collective 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 on which they reflected upon the highs and lows of their year at the conclusion of years one, two, and three. Finally, the focus group transcripts were referenced to understand their feelings as they reflected on the entire year.

### **Table 6.2**

*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) Enjoyable (Claudia) Exciting (Hank) Exciting (Claire) Adventurous (Paige)	Enjoyment (Wendy) Fun (Claudia) Funny (Crystal) Accomplished (Claire) Exciting (Paige)	Exciting (Sophia) Exciting (Helen) Easy (Claudia) Eventful (Hank)	Fulfilling (Helen) Amazing (Sophia) Fun (Crystal) Accomplished (Claire) Busy (Paige) Unique (Wendy)	Exciting (Helen) Fun (Claire) Determined (Hank)	Exhilarating (Sophia) Fun (Claire) Fun (Claudia) Determined (Hank)	Exciting/Stressful (Paige) Anticipation (Hank)	Good* (Sophia) Exciting/Stressful (Paige) Anticipation (Hank)	Interesting (Claudia)	Interesting (Claudia)	Reflective (Claudia)
Negative	Crazy (Sophia) Challenging (Helen) Stressful (Crystal)	Challenging (Hank) Challenging (Helen)	Exhausting (Claire) Tiring (Crystal) Crazy (Paige) Hard* (Wendy)	Hectic (Claudia) Tiresome (Hank)	Stressful (Crystal) Challenging (Helen) Busy (Paige) Frustrating (Wendy)	Blurr (Hank) Challenging (Helen) Crazy (Sophia)	Hectic (Claudia) Busy (Helen) Challenging* (Claire) Struggle* (Crystal)	Crazy (Claire) Awful (Crystal) Overwhelming (Hank) Rollercoaster (Sophia)	Crazy (Claire) Awful (Crystal) Overwhelming (Hank) Rollercoaster (Sophia)	Hectic (Claire) Crazy (Hank)	
Year 2											
Positive	Adventurous (Paige) Exciting (Helen) Prepared (Hank) Pleasant (Crystal)	Exciting (Helen) Adjusted (Hank) Motivated (Claire) Eventful (Paige)	Interesting/Eventful (Paige) Exciting (Helen) Thankful (Claire) Rewarding (Claudia) Better (Hank)	Exciting (Paige) Refreshed (Hank) A Breeze (Crystal) Motivated (Claire) Fun (Claudia) Challenging/Exciting (Helen)	Exciting (Helen) Fun (Claudia) Fast (Hank)	Exciting (Helen) Fun (Claudia) Fast (Hank)	Eventful (Paige) Comical (Crystal) Diverse (Claudia) Flexible* (Hank)	Eventful (Paige) Comical (Crystal) Diverse (Claudia) Flexible* (Hank)	Rewarding (Paige) Fun (Claudia) Pleased (Claire) Fun (Helen) Flexible (Hank)	Rewarding (Paige) Fun (Claudia) Pleased (Claire) Fun (Helen) Flexible (Hank)	Rewarding/Challenging (Paige)
Negative	Challenging (Claudia) Unprepared (Claire) Exhausting (Wendy)	Frustrating (Claudia) Tiresome (Hank) Busy (Paige) Hectic (Wendy) Not excited* (Crystal)	Frustrating (Wendy) Not excited (Crystal)	Frustrating (Wendy)	Challenging #Frustrating	Challenging (Crystal) Stressful (Crystal) Busy (Paige) Exhausting (Wendy)	Stressful (Crystal) Busy (Helen) Frustrating (Wendy)	Frustrating (Claire) Busy (Helen) Frustrating (Wendy)	Rollercoaster (Crystal) Frustrating (Wendy)	Rollercoaster (Crystal) Frustrating (Wendy)	Sucked (Crystal)
Year 3											
Positive	Exciting (Wendy) Excited (Crystal) Excited (Claire) Exciting (Claudia) Random (Helen)	Fun (Helen) Good (Crystal) Energetic (Claire) Creative (Claudia) Never There* (Paige)	Grateful (Claire) Calm before the Storm (Crystal) Frustrating/Exciting (Paige)	Fun (Helen) Fine (Crystal) Sprint (Claire) Chaos (Claudia) Frustrating (Wendy)	Easy (Paige) Enlightening (Helen) Exciting (Claudia) Rewarding/Challenging (Wendy)	Easy (Paige) Enlightening (Helen) Exciting (Claudia) Rewarding/Challenging (Wendy)	Relaxing (Paige) Exciting (Helen)	Diverse (Claudia) Sub Plans (Paige) Over it (Crystal) Frustrating (Claire) Challenging (Helen)	Excited (Crystal) Pleased (Claire) Fun (Claudia) Adaptable (Helen)	Excited (Crystal) Pleased (Claire) Fun (Claudia) Adaptable (Helen)	Relaxing (Paige) Refreshing (Helen)
Negative	Tiring (Paige)	Hectic (Wendy) Frustrating (Claudia) Exhausting (Claire) Exhausting (Helen)	Tiring (Claudia) Challenging (Helen) Chaotic (Wendy)	Overwhelming (Claudia) Hectic (Claire) Annoying (Crystal) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Overwhelming (Claudia) Hectic (Claire) Annoying (Crystal) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Overwhelming (Claudia) Hectic (Claire) Annoying (Crystal) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Overwhelming (Claudia) Hectic (Claire) Annoying (Crystal) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Overwhelming (Claudia) Hectic (Claire) Annoying (Crystal) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Chaotic (Paige) Hectic/Frustrating (Wendy)	Chaotic (Crystal)	

Note: \*Identifies words gathered from transcript, not provided by teacher

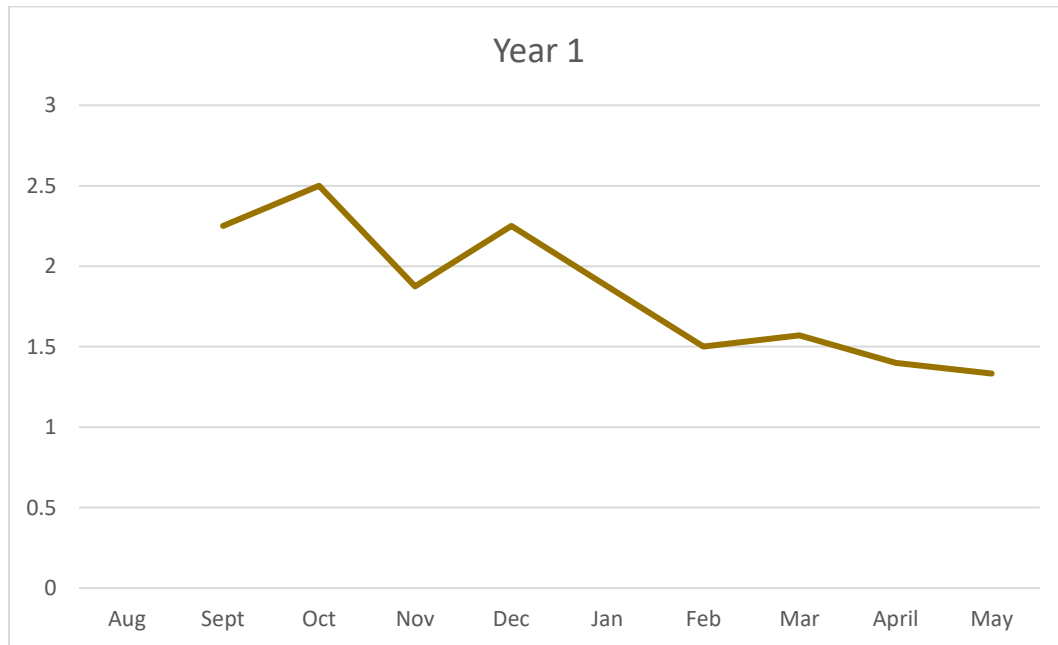
## **Year 1**

Year one for the teachers could be described as a “rollercoaster” possessing many highs and lows for the teachers, perhaps several in a month, week or even day. It is important to note that year one interviews did not happen until September to allow the teachers to get settled in their schools before the on-site visit, therefore, there is no information for their feelings as they began their first school year in August. The teachers described September as exciting (Hank & Clare) but eventually became overwhelmed with the many roles of the agriculture teacher in late October and early November. Teachers described this specific time as exhausting (Clare), tiring (Crystal), crazy (Paige) and hard (Wendy). Conversations with the teachers in the last few days before winter break showed an increase in their overall attitude toward teaching, although they were busy (Paige) drawing to the close of their first semester was fulfilling (Helen) and fun (Crystal). Within the month of January, another shift occurred. Conversations at the beginning of the month focused on fun (Clare & Claudia) but towards the end of January and leading into February it became challenging (Helen), busy (Paige) and crazy (Sophia). For these teachers, their attitude toward teaching remained less positive through the end of the semester. Although there were teachers who had individual highlights and successes as described by “good” for Sophia and “interesting” for Claudia, the collective feeling was hectic (Claudia), overwhelming (Hank), and awful (Crystal). The individual teachers’ attitudinal shifts throughout the first year are displayed in Figure 6.3.

### **Figure 6.3**

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



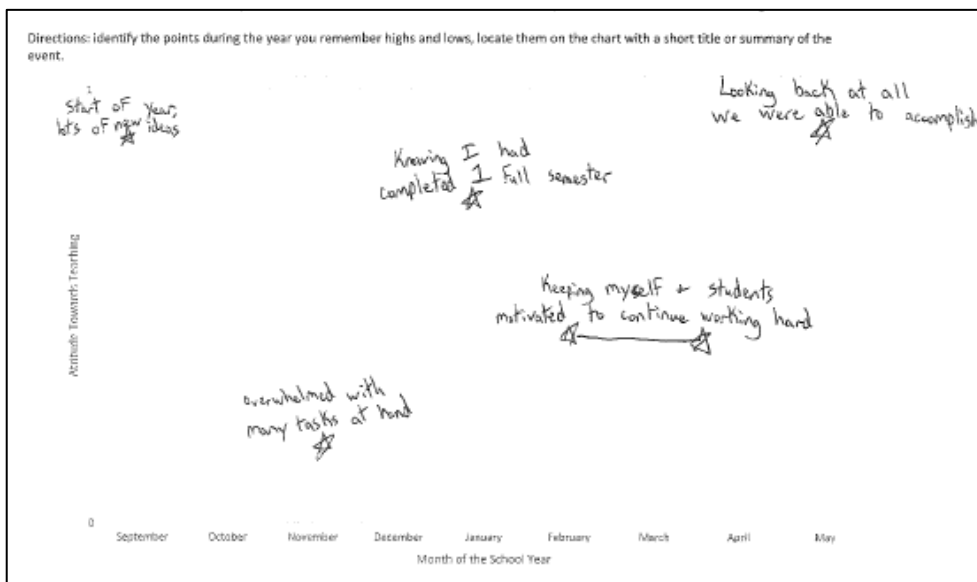


The monthly interviews were followed with a reflection guide the teachers completed before their focus group. In the reflection guides, the teachers responded to questions about their first-year teaching and charted the highs and lows of their year. The teachers described the beginning of the year as 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. Clare said November “fluctuated” for her, it was a very busy month. This feeling lasted into early November with community events and fundraising demanding additional time. January was a highlight as Wendy was “excited to come back after break” Clare 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, Clare and Claudia saw the end of the semester as a higher point of the year, as you can see in Figure 4, an excerpt from Hank’s reflection guide showing the highs and lows of his year.

**Figure 6.4**

*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.” Clare 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 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.

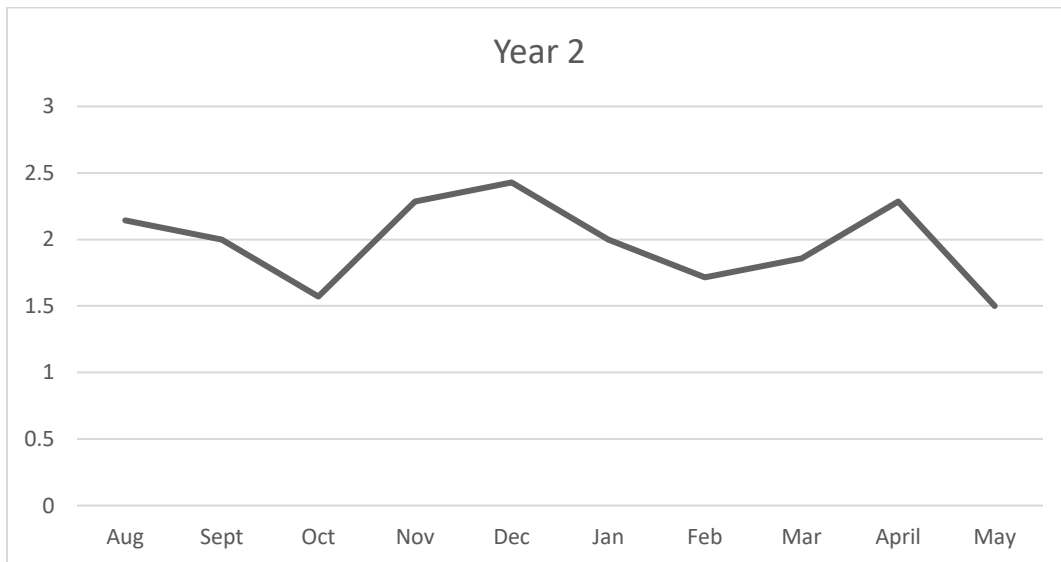
## **Year 2**

There were mixed feelings as teachers started their second year in August. Some felt prepared (Hank) and others felt the opposite, rather unprepared (Clare) but the collective feeling of the group was slightly positive. Their overall attitude toward teaching declined from August to November. The teachers felt busy (Paige) it was chaotic (Claudia) and hectic (Wendy). However, their attitudes increased in November when they described their teaching as rewarding (Claudia) and exciting (Helen). In December the conversations happened just prior to or during winter break when they were feeling refreshed (Hank) and motivated (Clare). As they returned to school

in January and through February the feelings were relatively neutral described as fast (Hank) and fine (Crystal) while others felt very busy (Paige & Helen). March and April brought increased positive feelings such as rewarding (Paige), fun (Claudia) and pleased (Clare). There were individual experiences that did not align 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 the end of the second year overall more positively than their first year. The attitudinal shifts each teacher experienced are summarized individually in Figure 6.5.

**Figure 6.5**

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

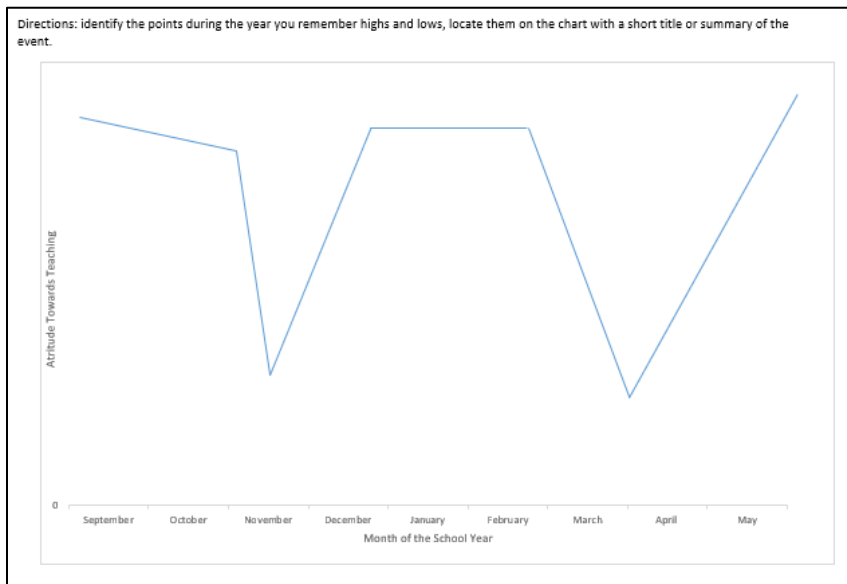


Once again, the monthly interviews were followed by an individual written reflection and focus group to reflect on year two. For Paige, the beginning of the year was once again exciting. Claudia was a bit more reserved at the beginning of the year because she was teaching a couple new classes. In October, November, and December there were some challenges with student attitudes and the fall fundraising chaos was again challenging. 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 State Department of Education “Horizon Award” for beginning teachers but that was followed with the craziness of March and April, she cited in April there was “literally not one day on the calendar without anything on it” which was challenging along with an overall lack of motivation in 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, an “awesome plant sale” and a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the year. Figure 6.6 shows how Paige visually represented the highs and lows of her second-year teaching.

**Figure 6.6**

*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 after the students, community, school, and parents had worked with the teachers before and they were no longer constantly feeling like they had to make a good first impression at all costs. Those teachers that changed schools between year #1 and #2 felt like they experienced year "1.5" feeling more confident in some areas and like a first-year teacher again in some situations. Overall, the year was admittedly easier than year one but came with some surprising challenges.

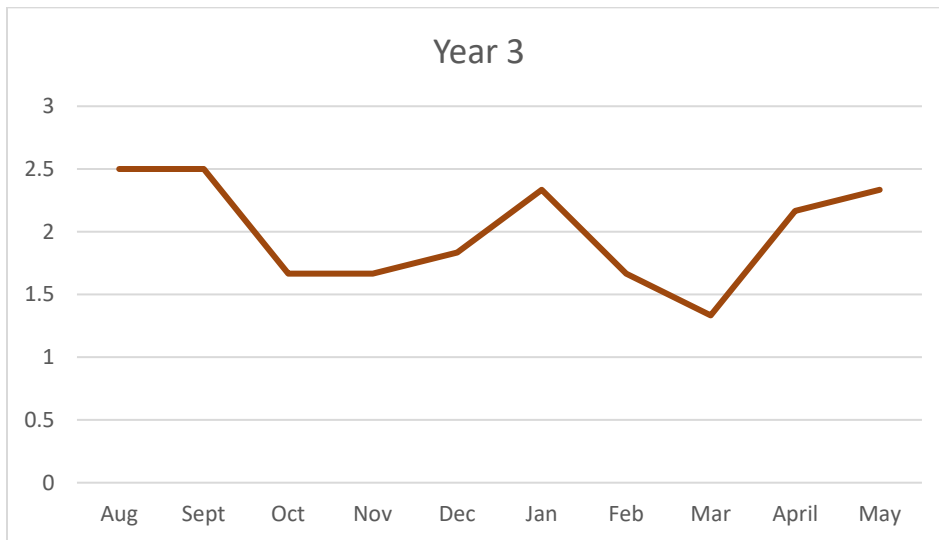
### **Year 3**

The beginning of year three was described as exciting (Wendy, Crystal, Clare & Claudia) and this attitude continued through September. However, October and November shifted to neutral to negative attitudes described as exhausting (Clare & Helen) and chaotic (Wendy). Crystal described her neutral as the "calm before the storm." This attitude lasted through December, but there was an overall shift to a more positive attitude in January as described as easy (Paige) and exciting (Claudia). This was temporary as their attitude shifted through the month of February to a neutral to negative attitude in March described as sub plans (Paige), over it (Crystal), and challenging (Helen). However, in April a slight shift to positive occurred as they described the year coming to the end. They responded pleased (Clare), 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 individual changes in their attitudes toward teaching are represented in Figure 6.7.

**Figure 6.7**

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

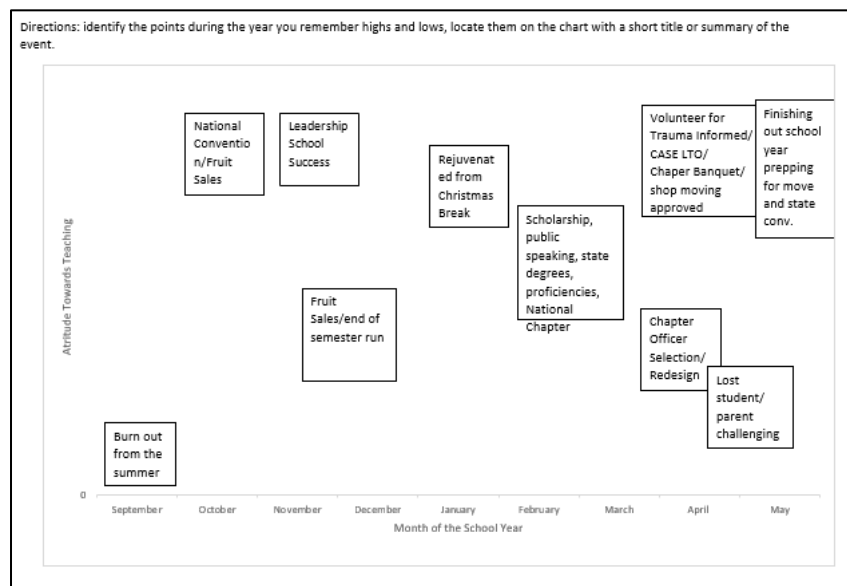


The final reflection guide and focus group were completed at the end of the teacher’s third year. They described their third year as beginning with a high, Crystal was excited about new administration, Helen had motivated officers and Wendy was excited to have “new things and new students.” In contrast, Clare 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 the 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 break

coming up. January allowed for a “rejuvenation from Christmas break” as described by Clare, but quickly became challenging with applications for Wendy and having a trip to Denver for the stock show cancelled for Crystal. 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 loss of students. 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. Clare described her year in Figure 6.8.

**Figure 6.8**

*Clare’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 like this, “one month it would be ‘I’m over it’ or it would be like ‘I love it,’ so definitely like Clare said, it just kind of depends on the day it was.”

Helen talked about the increased expectations of the community now that she is 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 of students in the classroom and not engaging with FFA events than they had experienced in the past.

However, the year as a whole must be taken into perspective, 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 of the reflection guide and focus group feelings. On a day-to-day basis the lows can be very low, and the highs can be very high, but when reflecting on the year as a whole, the teachers have a more positive attitude toward teaching than perhaps the monthly check-ins represent.

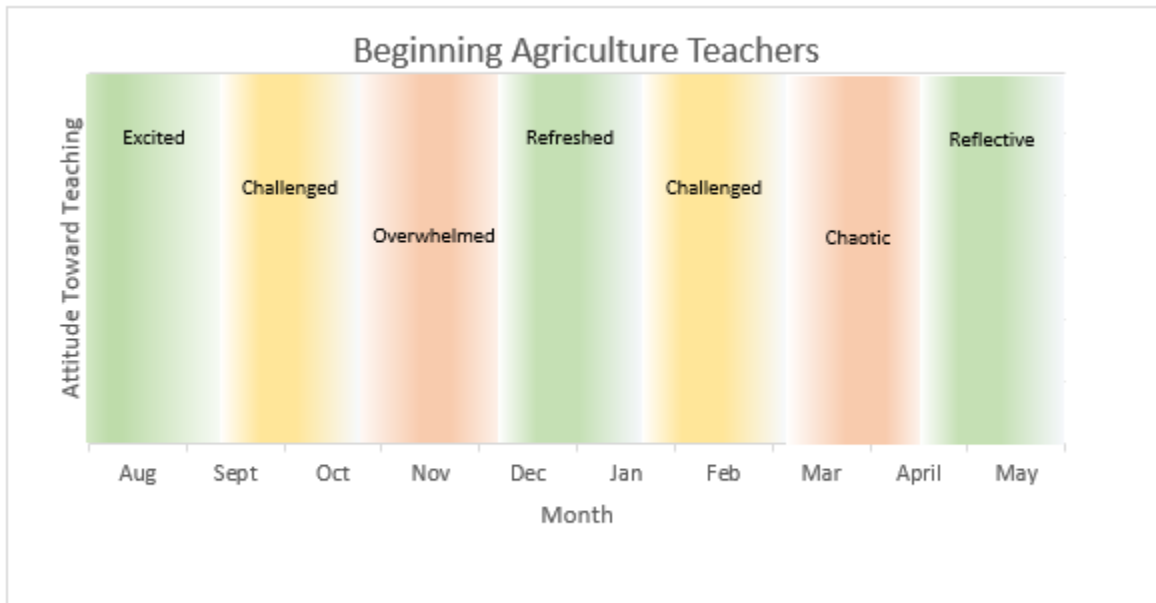
Research objective two sought to compare the experiences of the beginning agriculture teachers to Ellen Moir's (1999) "Phases of first year teachers' attitudes toward teaching." For this objective, the thoughts shared by the teachers are represented collectively by coding the individual words teachers used to describe their feelings toward teaching as "positive," "neutral," or "negative" and looking at the collective attitude of the group toward teaching.

The collective experiences of the beginning agriculture teachers in year one as shown in Table 6.5 was similar to the beginning of Moir's (1999) phases or model. Although feelings for August are not available, September was described as exciting by the agriculture teachers like the "anticipation" stage Moir (1999) describes. Similarly, to Moir's model (1999) 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, 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 (1999) purported. The collective experiences of the teachers in year 1 is displayed in Figure 6.9.

**Figure 6.9**

*Beginning Agriculture Teachers’ Attitude Toward Teaching During an Academic Year*



## Conclusions

When looking at the attitudinal shifts that occurred in year 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, the beginning agriculture teachers had a different experience in each of their three years, but there were more differences in year one than in years

two and three which were relatively similar in their attitude toward teaching.

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 reflecting 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 feelings 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 day versus how they reflect on the year as a whole.

Based on the information provided in the monthly interviews, annual reflection guides and the focus group interviews, Figure 6.9 seeks to represent the collective experience of this group of beginning teachers. The reflection guides identified the beginning of the year as a high point as they started the year and identified November as one of, if not the most, challenging months of the year. This also represents the "end of the year relief" described by some of the teachers in their reflection guides. In the second and third year, some felt the end of the year relief earlier than others, but all shared a reflective attitude. In the third-year focus group, the teachers talked about the ups and downs being present, but less significant when they reflect on the year as a whole rather than the month to month discussions. The model was based on the monthly interview descriptions and enhanced by the annual reflection guides and focus groups descriptions of their experiences. The terms used to describe the phases are from the teacher's descriptions based on their words they used to describe their feelings in table 6.1.

Collectively, the teachers started each year with *excitement*, and that word was the one used most frequently to describe the beginning of each year based on Table 6.1. Paige was excited to “see the relationships I’ve built...kids coming to find my room even if they don’t have me.” However, the excitement wore off and they were quickly *challenged* by the growing demands of their position. Other words 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 National FFA Convention, trying to catch up in the classroom and being faced with fall fundraising events, the teachers became *overwhelmed*, Claudia said, “I just have felt overwhelmed with the amount of stuff going on.” This was further impacted by the students being less engaged leading up to both fall and winter break. This feeling of being overwhelmed lasted late into the semester. However, their attitude changed during winter break. They entered the new year feeling accomplished having completed the fall semester and *refreshed* after a break. Helen said, “So my husband was having to do a lot of things I would normally do around the house...and so I don’t know it was just kind of nice to have a little break.” Once again, they were quickly focused on *challenges* as the demands of the agricultural education program increased in February, FFA Week celebrations, award applications and career development events demanded much of their time. The challenge impacted the classroom as well, Clare said, “I can’t believe it’s almost the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 9-weeks and I’m still trying to get kids motivated, I tell them I don’t want to fail you.” 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. Crystal said, “I am just kind of excited for next year and I’m excited to finish off the year.” 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.

The beginning agriculture teachers experienced some similarities to Moir’s model (1999) 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 (1999) described from December through the conclusion of the school year. 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 attitude towards teaching, for these teachers, they hit another slump around March similar to the one in November. How the year ended was relative to the teacher, some experienced a “recovery” in their attitude 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 (1999) model did not describe the majority of the first-year teaching experiences reflected by this group of teachers.

When comparing to the work by Rayfield et al. (2014) they found “minor changes in attitude among respondents occurred...but did not experience the high level of fluctuation by Moir” (pg. 147) where the present qualitative study does find major fluctuations, but at different times than Moir suggested. However, Rayfield’s (2014) overall finding of a “feeling generally positive in attitude 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 decrease in attitude toward teaching in November and the increase in December followed by a decrease in February and a final increase at the end of the year also aligned. 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.

### **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, 1999). Induction programs should keep the “highs” and “lows” of the teachers’ attitudes toward teaching in mind when planning induction events and the stage of the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* the teachers are in (Fessler and Christensen, 1992). For example, hosting an in person or online meeting in early October will 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 help them 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 may help mentors support other beginning agriculture teachers who may face similar challenges.

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

To further understand the agriculture teachers' unique experiences this study should be conducted with mid and late-career professionals to determine whether the "roller coaster" (Moir, 1999) of events continues beyond the beginning teacher stages. This research could be aligned with the *Teacher Career Cycle Model* (Fessler & Christensen, 1992) to look at 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 and the experiences of alternatively certified agriculture teachers should be explored to see if they align or are different as Ingersoll (2004) states underprepared teachers have an increased chance of leaving the profession therefore understanding their needs is even more critical to the teacher retention puzzle.

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## **Chapter 7 - Additional Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications**

The support of early career teachers is not just about the teacher, rather, a more successful beginning teacher decreases faculty turnover in a school which preserves funds related to recruitment and training costs, increases morale, and student achievement (Ronfeldt, et al. (2013). We do not know specifically what the possible impacts of enhanced teacher retention in agricultural education might include. Likely impacts may be a more successful agriculture program, increased engagement within the school and community and long-term retention in the profession, increased engagement in FFA and perhaps more interest in agricultural education as a career due to students' positive experiences in the program. It is no surprise some teachers leave the profession, the first three years of teaching are a rollercoaster of experiences, emotions, accomplishments, and challenges for the beginning agriculture teachers (Moir, 1999). Based on their experiences, beginning teachers need a comprehensive program structured to meet their unique needs that combines mentoring, peer support, just-in-time resources, and collaboration. This chapter will address findings directly related to the research questions:

- How do participants describe their feelings towards teaching as a career?
- What do participants perceive as their accomplishments and challenges related to teaching and managing an agricultural education program?
- How do participants describe their relationships and interactions with mentors?

Additional themes that arose from the study are also addressed. Furthermore, recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research are provided.

## Conclusions

### **How do participants describe their feelings toward teaching as a career?**

As previous research has stated (Moir, 1999; Rayfield, 2014) at the end of the first year the teachers saw their career in a positive light, despite experiencing both highs and lows during the year. Helen said, “there’s your good days where you are like, ‘Wow, I wish I had that day every day,’ and then there are those days you’re like, ‘why do I have this job.’ So, I don’t know, it’s a very fluctuating feeling for me.” Similarly, Clare said “While sometimes I get stressed out, other times I am like ‘this is why I wanted to be an ag teacher.’”

When looking at each year, the teachers tended to start each semester with a positive attitude, they were refreshed from a break, had new ideas and energy. As the semester wore on, there was a mid-semester slump when the many responsibilities of the job, classroom, FFA, SAE’s and additional responsibilities within the school became overwhelming causing further challenges with work/life balance. However, as the semester ended, they could look back and see the accomplishments and progress made. On any given day, the teachers could have a “good” or “bad” day but at the end of the year, despite the challenges, the feelings towards the career were generally positive.

### **What do participants perceive as their accomplishments and challenges related to teaching and managing an agricultural education program?**

There were accomplishments and challenges throughout the three-year study that evolved as themes summarized in Table 7.1, while others were very specific to an individual teacher and their situation. Overall, in their first year the teachers felt accomplished in the areas of student, faculty, and community relationships, creating a student-centered classroom, and diversifying the opportunities provided to students through agricultural education. At the same time, they were

challenged by obtaining feedback, learning school processes, curriculum and planning, student management, time management, change, and SAE's. Their challenges with time, especially when considering the time they spent on curriculum and planning, aligns with research by Moir (1990), Whittington et al. (2006) and Ball et al. (2007). Solomonson (2019) suggested time management should be a part of novice teachers' professional development to help increase agriculture teacher retention.

There were themes that started as a challenge at the beginning of the year, but the teachers were able to figure them out by the end of the year and they were no longer considered challenges. For example, early in year one, the teachers talked about struggling to manage the technology use in their classroom, some felt students had too much freedom to access a variety of sites not related to content, some were challenged by students not bringing their devices or having them charged and ready to use, others had a lack of technology. However, by the end of the school year, the technology challenges were rarely discussed. Clare said,

I had a bunch of outdated computers and so I always had to take my class to the library to work on technology and they were already late coming over to my room. Then by the time we like did work and then we got down to the library it was wasting a lot of time but luckily my vice principal last year was awesome and he worked with me to get nine new computers in my classroom.”

**Table 7.1**

*Accomplishments and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year One*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Growing student numbers	Feedback and measuring success
Student leadership team	School processes & logistics
Student learning	Curriculum and planning

Student Relationships, faculty relationships and community relationships (in that order)	Student management – specifically Special Education students, technology management and student motivation
Student-centered classroom	Time management
Long term planning	Change
Community support	SAE's
Diversifying opportunities provided to students	Work/life balance

In year two, the teachers continued to feel confident in student, faculty, and community relationships, they were more confident in creating student learning experiences and noted the FFA chapter was easier to manage (see Table 7.2). They also were confident in accepting additional responsibilities in the school. At the same time, they were challenged by increasing class sizes and the facilities and equipment to meet those larger numbers. Curriculum and daily lesson planning were better, but still hard. Student motivation was a challenge. They wanted experience with specific events they had not experienced before and were overwhelmed by getting everything done. In year two the teachers were accepting additional responsibilities in the school in addition to managing the agricultural education program. They were not necessarily financially motivated to take on these new roles, but rather saw them as a way to help the teachers spend time outside of the agricultural education program, pursue another personal passion and engage with new faculty and students. Hank described his decision to take on an assistant athletic role,

It was just an extra interest and I really think that not only for the students' sake, yeah, I did get some extra contact with students that way, building relationships. But for me it was equally beneficial within other faculty members to be seen more of the – management role other than just in the classroom.

The tendency for agriculture teachers to take on additional roles within the school is not unique to this group as it was also identified by Smalley and Rank (2019) when early field experience students visited agriculture teachers, they identified the many roles the teachers were filling within the schools. There is a concern that taking on too much can lead to teacher burnout so teachers should not make these decisions without careful consideration (Byrne, 1994).

**Table 7.2**

*Strengths and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year Two*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
FFA is smoother	Significant class size changes
Informal mentoring	Facilities and equipment
Student relationships	Curriculum planning
Student learning	Lack of student motivation
Community relationships	Funding
Work/life integration or more balance	Planning – better but still hard
Additional roles	Experience with specific events
Faculty relationships	Overwhelmed

In year three, the teachers continued to experience success in relationships, they were able to improve previous lessons, select resources, identify needs, and provide student input on instruction. They had more established classroom routines and an overall increased awareness in the classroom. They were finally able to feel comfortable delegating FFA responsibilities to students or adult volunteers, and those volunteers were easier to identify as a result of increased community communication. Despite these successes, time management was still a struggle, especially related to FFA. The teachers were able to be more efficient in content delivery, encouraging them to search for additional content to add to their courses. Establishing SAE's was still a challenge, for some more than others. They still utilized mentors, but it occurred on an as needed basis. The teachers did not feel like they were still “novice,” but they did not feel they

were prepared to take on the role of a mentor either. They were left feeling like they have information and resources they could give to beginning teachers, but there are still a lot of questions they are unable to answer for themselves, let alone a mentee. Helen described her thoughts on mentoring,

I'm still novice, but then at the same time when I get together with other teachers in the district and ask them what they're doing or what they're struggling with I kind of feel like 'oh, I've already been through that, so I know how to deal with that.'

The challenges and accomplishments of their third-year teaching are summarized in Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3**

*Strengths and Challenges Faced by Beginning Agriculture Teachers in Year Three*

<b>Accomplishments</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Providing students input and freedom of choice	Time management – FFA is especially demanding
Improvement of previous lessons	Finding additional content to add to courses as they now move through content faster
Established classroom routines	Student lack of motivation
Increased classroom awareness	In the moment needs from mentors on specific topics
Curriculum planning, identifying curriculum needs and selecting resources	SAE
Delegation of FFA responsibilities to student leaders	Student management (behavior) both in the classroom and at FFA events
Positive relationships	Social media
Community support as a result of increased communication	

**How do participants describe their relationships and interactions with mentors?**

How the teachers utilized mentors changed throughout the three-year study. In the first few years, the novice teachers started with relying on the cooperating teacher they worked with in the spring, next they became highly reliant upon a mentor in the school (many times this was formally assigned) and then began to transition questions they would have asked to their



cooperating teachers to other agriculture teachers in their district and to their peers. This group of teachers used three different kinds of mentors, formal or informal mentors within the school, informal mentors within their FFA district and informal peer mentoring. Hank described his mentoring experiences,

I personally was assigned a mentor of a different curriculum area here at the same high school. For me I guess I have two points to add. It seemed like all of our CDEs, we went to – for me I kind of count that as mentoring as well while kids were doing their own thing or competing or whatever it was just finding kind of a group or kind of mingling around with other advisors as we have the time and the need and so I don't think that was necessarily, you know, a formal sense of mentoring but just hearing from other teachers, it seems some of you guys are in the same district as myself, hearing struggles and successes from new teachers as well as more experienced teachers knowing they were having the same struggles as I was and that feels good that same things they did, that was really positive for me.

There were two situations that were specifically less productive as mentor relationships. One teacher's district hired an "online mentor" who provided support virtually in addition to a few visits to her classroom. The mentor's inability to provide insight in the district, school process, and student backgrounds was a hindrance. Furthermore, her virtual assignments were repetitive of her undergraduate experience and the onsite visits were poorly scheduled. Paige said, "we have an online mentor...it is kind of pointless...It's through the school, they are using it for the state requirement...it's essentially an online class so we have to read articles, do discussion boards, and then she comes and visits us once a quarter for observation." The other less productive relationship was the use of the agriculture co-teacher as a mentor, Helen said

“My mentor was my co-teacher as well and that was kind of hard because I wasn’t able to have a mentor from a different district and so that made it difficult. I feel like I wish I would have that.”

As the teachers moved into their second- and third-year teaching, they still needed the support of multiple mentors, but the structure was less formal, and the inquiries were less frequent. For those who did not have the school mentor, it was hard. Helen described her mentoring experience in her second year, “I don't have a mentorship or anything anymore. And I don't have a mentor at the school, they didn't require me to get a mentor here, but the other teachers have been pretty good.”

### **Additional Themes**

While these themes were not directly related to the research questions, they emerged in the data analysis and connect to the literature but, were not specifically addressed in the articles. These experiences are unique to this group of teachers but, could potentially impact practice and future research.

The shift from *teacher centered to student centered focus* happened for this group, largely in year two. In the first year, the teachers were concerned about keeping students “busy,” they were consistently challenged with technology as a distraction rather than a teaching tool. There were conversations about just-in-time planning, for example, they were focused on what will they teach tomorrow rather than a long-term focus of curriculum. Over time, the teachers would refer to learning experiences rather than keeping students busy. Measures of accomplishments in their teaching were based on providing evidence on how students applied information rather than basing it on engagement in the lesson. As the teachers got to know their students better, they were selecting lessons students would “like” but later selected lessons they knew students “needed.” This shift did not happen at the same time for each teacher, but each experienced the

transition. Wendy talked about how she worked to refine her student-centered teaching at the mid-point of her second year,

It's still a struggle on planning getting the right amount of stuff for each student. You are always going to have one or two students who are not at the same point, I know I am not hitting every student's needs, but it is getting better.

Boone and Boone (2007) cited that student-centered agriculture teachers showed a higher retention rate in the profession, which was the case for this group of teachers.

How the participants *gauge their success* as a teacher shifted throughout the three-year study. When asked about their greatest accomplishments during their first year, the teachers most often relayed their most recent CDE team ranking. For example, when asked what was going well during the second quarter of her first year, Paige said "seeing a lot more kids be interested in FFA in general, but also my kids kind of started to see their first success at the dairy cattle and dairy foods competition." Later, the accomplishments list would also include parent and/or community engagement, and evidence of student learning. For example, when reflecting on her third year, Claudia said "I think how I measure success is how my kids do, I guess, like are they using what they learn in class, in real life or in their other classes...to me success is seen as kids put what they've learned to use."

Early in their career, one of the only "measurements" of success (or lack of success) were FFA competitions. This is not the only measure that should be provided to beginning teachers and this could perpetuate the impression agricultural education is only about FFA competitions. The teachers need accurate and frequent feedback in all areas of their program to help them grow as an agriculture teacher. Since the teachers spend the majority of their time teaching (Torres et

al. 2008), it would seem they would first measure their success on their teaching ability, however, it appears feedback on teaching is limited, but feedback on FFA performance in competitions is frequent and perhaps this is why they are more likely to measure their success based on FFA performance.

The novice teacher's morale was significantly impacted by their *relationships* with other staff in the building and the administration. Staff who reached out and invited them to play on sports leagues, organized get-togethers outside of school or purposefully included the teachers caused the beginning teachers to be happier with the school and their career. Claudia said,

The school is very accepting of new teachers, everyone has asked me if I need help with stuff. They have been more than willing to show me how things work around the school... they go out to supper one night; they always invite me."

The perceived support of the administration also had a similar impact. Administrators who told the teachers they were there to support them and then did so, were noted as being very supportive. For example, Clare said "I know regardless of any decisions I have had to make or any questions I have had, my principal and vice principal have stood by me." Novice teachers who felt the administration did not communicate clear expectations or failed to back their decisions led to frustrated teachers, as Walker et al. (2004) identified when researching the measures of job satisfaction, negative administration relationships can have a significant impact. Paige said, "we don't have complete support yet of the faculty members and administration." As the teachers spent more time in the schools, they identified specific faculty members as peers for support, often these individuals were not their assigned mentors, but rather teachers they connected with on their own.

At the beginning of their career, all the novice teachers had intentions of establishing *SAE* programs, and a few took action to make it happen. As Wolf (2011) identified, *SAE* was the biggest challenge for the teachers and the component they spent the least amount of time on. It was quickly the item they all identified they needed to spend more time with but just did not have time to do so. Crystal described this as,

It's like I'm juggling three things and I'm not a very good juggler anyway...I have two or three boys that have really strong *SAE*'s and they want their State Degrees...I just really need to sit down and go through AET myself and have them do it and just take that time.”

Those who engaged with the *SAE* for all training between their first and second year of teaching discussed specific resources they gained that made *SAEs* more manageable. Hank said, “the *SAE* Institute really gave me some good ideas how to better incorporate that into some of my class work and into some of the things that I've already been doing.” By year three, everyone had more *SAE* engagement, but few were at the level they wanted to be.

In year one, *curriculum and planning* happened in a just-in-time fashion. Often, their plans were made hours before they taught. This changed significantly in year two as they had resources from the prior year to build on. The teachers would critically evaluate what they had from the previous year and adjust, modify, or replace as needed. They were able to plan by thinking of multiple lessons together rather than just one day at a time. Clare described this transition at the end of year two,

I feel like last year I really focused on day-by-day. And this year I was able to think more weeklong...it just seemed a lot easier thinking about what I was going to do and how I was going to do it this year.”

*Time management* was a challenge for all teachers as stated by Lambert et al. (2011) and Meister and Melnick (2003), both at school and at home, but how they managed the challenge was very different. This had a direct impact on work/life balance as other researchers also discovered (Gregory & Milner, 2009; Solomonson et al. 2019; Sorensen & McKim 2014). Some teachers relied on a strict work/life balance philosophy that was often tied to time, they would not work past a specific time or take at least one day a week away from school. During the first year, Paige said

I set the goal at the beginning I was never going to take work home. I would say I did a pretty good job at that but just like [peer] my mind was always on it. So even if I wasn't working physically on it, my mind was.

Helen's challenge was specific to work/life balance, she said, "My significant other wants to do things after school and I try to make him my first priority but that means I am going to have to do that grading some other time and it's hard to balance." In year one, Wendy simply said, "right now I really don't have a balance." However, in year three Wendy described her balance differently, "I would say it's doing pretty good, especially now with - well, with graduate school, keeping that going and then harvest coming up." Even with the added responsibility of graduate school alongside working with her family farm she felt she had more balance in year three than in year one. Solomonson (2019) suggested time management should be a part of novice teachers' professional development to help increase agriculture teacher retention, this group of teachers shows us there are solutions that can be effective in creating more balance, but they are not currently being utilized in their first year, induction programs could address these tendencies.

Over time, some teachers leaned toward a work/life integration model where they found ways to connect their “work” and “life” to accomplish both at once. Both Hank and Paige talked about the importance of their spouses understanding what they do and the time it takes during certain times of the year and stepping up when it was necessary knowing that time would be exchanged later. Hank had especially utilized a work/life integration model, for example he said, “My family has been really supportive, and they will come to the school for events and activities. Daycare was closed, and he ended up coming here one afternoon so that was nice to have that option.”

The novice teachers cited so many different *teaching resources* they were using, from textbooks and teacher’s guides to magazines, websites, online curriculum, files from other teachers and making their own from scratch. During her first year, Clare said,

I used the combination of some textbooks, a couple of online resources and CASE...which I would feel that these really helped me not to be as stressed out. I mean I was stressed out but at least knowing I had one class that was ready to go for me for the most part.

There was little consistency as to what they were using to create the learning experiences for students, in contrast to Clare, Hank said,

I would say for me, you know, through our time there are three blocks and then a student teaching [semester] and having access to multiple sources of curriculum and online sources and whatnot, I kind of found myself last year when those online sources left I ended up going back to the textbook.

Later in their career, the search for resources was largely to guide the content knowledge they were seeking to learn more about (Easterly & Myers, 2017; Figland et al., 2019; Washburn et al., 2001).

A theme emerged of *place and space* and the impact on the beginning teacher's experience. Within this study, there is a story of the teacher who returned home directly after graduation, the teacher who left teaching after year two for production agriculture, the teacher who returned to her student teaching site after her first year, the teacher who transitioned from a single teacher to multi-teacher program after year one, the teacher who transitioned from a multi teacher to a single teacher program after year one, the teachers who transitioned between year one and two of teaching, the teacher who returned home after her second year of teaching, the teachers who experienced family changes during their first three years (marriages, pregnancies, etc.). As Helen pondered being a newlywed and adjusting her time to be home with her husband and planning ahead to growing their family she began to re-consider some of those additional responsibilities, for her, it was time to give up cheer, even though it was a difficult decision, "I was pondering, do I really want to do this again next year? But I know it would be hard to say no."

### **Implications for Practice**

Recommendations for practice from this group of agriculture teachers reveals a program that meets the needs of beginning agriculture teachers is multifaceted and requires individuals involved in leading the district/regional, state, and national programs communicate clear expectations and resources to the teachers. Each state should have a coordinator of novice teacher activities, who supports the teachers beyond the first year, and provides support at a



declining rate throughout the first three years of teaching. Not all novice teacher support should be provided by one person, but this individual should coordinate the team to ensure consistency in the messages, products and programs provided to novice teachers.

The structure of beginning teacher programs should include the following:

- Face-to-face meetings to encourage social development and a sense of belonging (DeLay & Washburn, 2013)
- Virtual meetings to provide timely information
- Multiple mentors in their school building, FFA district/region, and peer mentor(s)
- In-the-moment resources provided by the state for teachers to access on a need-to-know basis
- A method to ensure teachers are receiving feedback on all aspects of their job (classroom, FFA, and SAE) by an individual in an agricultural education mentoring role
- A dedicated coordinator to orchestrate a complete program that is strategic and spans over multiple years.
- Content of the meetings should be responsive and adjusted to meet the specific needs of the group of agriculture teachers they are serving, not a strict pre-set agenda.

The meetings and mentors developed a sense of belonging for this group of teachers, Claudia said her highlight of the month was “Ag Ed symposium and just seeing people I haven't seen for a while and getting connected to the other Ag teachers.”

When mentors are being selected, and matched to mentees, attention to the quality of the relationships that could develop is essential. Burriss (2006), Lamm et al. (2020) and Tummons et al. (2016) found when mentors and mentees feel they have similarities or previous relationships they tend to be more productive. Pfund (2006) and Darling-Hammond (2017) support the need for mentor training and continued support provided to the mentor.

Based on this specific group of beginning teachers, the following content (Table 7.4) was identified as themes the teachers wanted to know that could be delivered through professional

development. Therefore, these topics should be considered, but the specific group of teachers being supported need to be asked to identify what they feel successful at and where they are challenged to provide content that is responsive to their specific needs. In addition to this content, observations were made that beginning teachers could also benefit from being coached on how to develop a healthy relationship with their administration, specifically on how to open the lines of communication and request feedback.

**Table 7.4**  
*Suggested Content to be Delivered by Year*

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Obtaining supplies and equipment	SAE	Student motivation
Student management	Parent communication	New ideas
Balancing and prioritizing FFA, SAE and classroom	Isolation	Communicating with the broader community
Agriculture content and/or delivery resources	Evaluating additional responsibilities	Work/life balance
Work/life balance		

The experiences learned in this study were limited by the demographics of the teachers and the communities and schools in which they taught. This study provides a valuable insight into the experiences of traditionally certified white teachers teaching in predominately white urban clusters and rural Kansas towns (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). Within this specific population we learned about the experiences of females getting established in the agricultural education profession. One female teacher noticed an increased interest in non-traditional females in classes with a female teacher, Helen said “being a new female ag teacher I had a lot of girls show a lot more interest in these classes” Two females had male teaching partners and commented that it was easier for some of the students to make relationships with

them as female teachers than their male co-teacher, Paige tried to determine why this was the case and was not sure, “whether it’s because I’m female or a different teaching style.” Helen described her experiences getting established as an agriculture teacher in a new community, she said,

Females kind of get like the flack for being in Ag Ed and I feel like a lot of people say that like 'oh it's a man's job' and so it's really surprising when I hear that because if I tell people I'm an Ag instructor they are like 'Oh! But you are a girl' and they find it weird that we teach shop classes. And so sometimes they feel like men have it easier because it's a role that people have seen a lot of men in but I don't know, I think when they say that I tell them, well you know it's pretty much 50/50. Especially our graduating class, we had more girls than guys... I feel like until you establish that you know you can do it then people are going to follow you and understand that you can take it on. But I do think that some girls might have a hard time with it in the beginning, it just takes time.”

How can novice teacher programs support young females in getting established in the community and develop rapport and respect?

Preservice teacher educators can begin by integrating the advising, coaching, mentoring continuum (Hastings & Kane, 2018) into the student experience as freshmen. Educating students on how others can help them grow and teaching them to seek feedback will benefit them throughout their college experience and professional career. Finally, faculty modeling the use of advising, coaching, and mentoring will grow students to be more prepared to seek and accept this type of support as an early career professional.

There are valuable recommendations for preservice programs. How can programs establish healthy expectations for novice teachers related to work/life balance, time management, and how to gauge success? There are numerous opportunities for preservice teachers to engage with in-services teachers, when selecting programs to partner with, ensure the teacher and program have realistic expectations (Solomonson et al., 2019; Thieman et al. 2014). Providing preservice teachers an opportunity to observe a variety of programs with various demographics and diverse populations also allows them to envision what teaching might look like for them in the future. Knowing that work/life balance is a challenge for agriculture teachers (Lambert, et al, 2011; Solomonson, et al, 2019; Sorensen & McKim, 2014), how can preservice programs have meaningful discussions about this reality and teach potential solutions such as work/life integration plans? Teachers would benefit in being led to have critical conversations about work/life balance with those close to them prior to their first-year teaching.

Preservice programs usually teach student management, but this continues to be a topic beginning teacher are challenged by (Myers et al., 2005; Wentzel & Miele, 2009). Student motivation as documented by Ball (2016) was also a significant challenge for these beginning teachers, especially in years two and three. In fact, a lack of student motivation effected the entire agricultural education program including the FFA and SAE components. Ball (2016) reminds us student management and student motivation go hand in hand, and preservice programs need to arm graduates with resources for both.

Preservice teachers can also benefit from learning about how to make positive relationships in their new school. School culture has a significant impact on teacher retention rate (Cherubini, 2009). Within the school, teachers need to know how to develop a positive relationship with faculty to overcome the potential feeling of isolation (Gordon, 1991). This is

even more important for agriculture teachers who find the nature of their job and often the physical location of their classrooms further promote isolation (Flinders, 1988; Mundt, 1991; Talbert et al, 1994). Teachers need to know the importance of their presence in the building and to take advantage of any opportunity to interact with other faculty. The teachers in this study had varying quality of relationships with their principals, and a various number of observations from their administration. However, one message was clear, the teachers did not feel they received enough guidance on expectations or feedback from administration. Crystal provided this example, “I finally got told in the hallway yesterday that I needed to do lesson plans. I sent them to him, but I haven’t got any feedback.” Beginning teachers should think about the plan they will use to promote positive interactions with their administrator and seek feedback by asking for observations rather than complain that they do not receive them.

Finally, this study aligns with the notion that beginning teachers are going to experience many highs and lows in their first year but overall, most feel generally satisfied and happy at the end of the year (Moir, 1999; Rayfield et al., 2014). Preservice programs can help beginning teachers prepare themselves for the highs and lows, so they are not surprised when they encounter them but despite the roller coaster of highs and lows, teachers feel satisfied with their career overall.

State leadership can support beginning agriculture teachers by gathering and organizing the resources beginning agriculture teachers need in a common space. The teachers were not always working between eight and five p.m. and even if there was a training provided, they did not always remember the information at the specific time in which they needed it. Resources for beginning teachers need to be readily available on their timeline and located in a common space, perhaps in a place all teachers can benefit from.

Administrators can make the beginning teachers want to stay or leave (Anderman, 1991; Sutchter, 2016). Administrators can further support beginning teachers by establishing clear expectations, fostering formal and informal mentoring programs in their school, and supporting teacher morale. The teachers who were most satisfied at their school felt supported by their administration and faculty peers. Regardless of how much feedback teachers were provided in their first years, they all wanted more. Teacher induction program coordinators or teacher mentors should consider monthly meetings with novice teachers to learn about their experiences in the school, clarify expectations and to provide informal feedback.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was a big picture view of the novice agriculture teacher experience and sparked interest in several areas to be researched in the future. First, this study was narrow in the nature of teacher's demographics. All the teachers were white, in their mid-twenties, traditionally certified and mostly female. Similar studies should be done that are more inclusive of non-traditionally certified teachers, in urban environments and with more diverse teacher and student populations to get a better picture of the experiences of beginning teachers from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.

This study could be enhanced by learning more about the participants such as their growth mind set, strengths, Myers-Briggs or Gregoric Style and partnering the established methods with this additional information about who the participants are to learn how these factors may support beginning teachers and their ability to preserver through the challenges of the novice teaching years. Learning more about the personalities of the participants would also paint a more detailed picture of who they are as individuals and the impact on their teaching style and ability to develop relationships in education.

Recommendations have been made for beginning teachers to have mentors and those mentors should be carefully selected and supported (Burris, et al. 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Greiman, 2002; Lamm et al. 2020; Kitchel & Garton, 2016; Pfund et al. 2006; Tait, 2008). This study suggests beginning teachers can benefit greatly from guided reflection on a regular basis and a mentor may be the most logical person to lead the reflection. If a mentor is expected to lead reflection, what are the qualities the mentors need to possess? Should the mentors be self-selected to ensure a prior relationship as Lamm (2020) suggests? If the mentors are matched, what are the most important traits to consider?

The participants in this study were born in the early 1990's labeling them the millennial generation. This research shows their experience with work/life balance and work to attempt work/life balance was varied. What defines work/life balance success for millennials and generation Z and how does that compare to generation x and baby boomers? If our mentors are from a different generation than our beginning teachers, what is the impact on mentoring them through work/life balance?

The definition of work/life balance (Gregory & Milner, 2009) for this group of teachers may be directly impacted by how they define a successful agriculture teacher. Is a successful agriculture teacher one who aids students in winning awards, one who is highly respected as a teacher, a valued community member or an individual who is able to balance all of the roles along with also establishing a life outside of their career. There is an opportunity to learn about our beginning teachers' definitions of work/life balance and how they define success in agricultural education so they can be mentored to be able to have both, contributing to a rewarding, long term experience in the profession.

Ronfeldt (2013) shows us the potential losses to a school related to teacher turnover including costs, morale, and student achievement drops. Research opportunities also exist based on the impact of teacher turnover on the agricultural education program, the school, and the community. If teachers are not supported, and they leave the school and/or profession, what is the long-term impact left behind on students, the school, and the community?

This study focused on the young professional in agricultural education. What do the young professionals in extension education or agricultural sales and service experience? How might the experiences of the beginning teacher be similar or different than other young professionals in the agriculture and/or education industry?

As this document is being written, the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting education worldwide. Education as we know it has been turned up-side down, teachers have been forced to teach remotely for weeks and attempt to support students who lack the technology, resources and parental guidance to be as successful learning as their peers. Current and future teachers will be impacted by this experience their entire careers. Research should be done to determine the impact of this pandemic on all stages of education, prospective teachers as well as those in each stage of Fessler and Christensen's (1992) *Teacher Career Cycle Model*.

- Finally, each beginning teacher has a unique experience and their story should be told. Individual dialogues highlighting the unique experiences of each teacher need to be shared to obtain the thick, rich details of their life and career to inform those supporting beginning teachers so we can support them at the highest level for the success of individual teachers, programs, and most of all, students.

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## Appendix A - IRB Approval



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Brandie Disberger  
Communications  
301 Umberger

Proposal Number: 8387

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 08/25/2016

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Examining the Needs of 1st year Agriculture Teachers and their Attitude towards Teaching"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

TO: Dr. Brandie Disberger  
Communications and Agricultural Education  
316 Umberger Hall

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 08/01/2017

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Examining the Needs of Agriculture Teachers and their Attitude towards Teaching."

Proposal Number: 8884

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for one year from the date of this correspondence, pending "continuing review."**

APPROVAL DATE: 08/01/2017

EXPIRATION DATE: 08/01/2018

Several months prior to the expiration date listed, the IRB will solicit information from you for federally mandated "**continuing review**" of the research. Based on the review, the IRB may approve the activity for another year. **If continuing IRB approval is not granted, or the IRB fails to perform the continuing review before the expiration date noted above, the project will expire and the activity involving human subjects must be terminated on that date. Consequently, it is critical that you are responsive to the IRB request for information for continuing review if you want your project to continue.**

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.  
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

TO: Brandie Disberger  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Number: #8884

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair *RSmf*  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

DATE: June 1, 2018

RE: Continuing Review of Your Proposal Entitled, "Examining the Needs of Agriculture Teachers and their Attitude towards Teaching"

**Originally Approved by the IRB: 08/01/17**

**Expiration Date: 08/01/18**

Federal regulatory officials (OHRP) have interpreted that human subjects protocols / activities can be approved by IRBs for only **ONE YEAR** at a time. For your current human subjects activity to continue past that one year **EXPIRATION DATE**, the protocol / activity must undergo "continuing review" and approval, if appropriate, by the IRB.

**Consequently, if you want your project to continue past the expiration date, it is critical that you are responsive to this request for information for the IRB "continuing review." Once the expiration date has arrived, the activity involving human subjects must stop if continuing review and approval has not occurred.**

1. Your project was classified by the Committee as involving

- No more than minimal risk to subjects  
 Greater than minimal risk to subjects

The Federal definition of minimal risk is that "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests."

2. What is the status of this project?

- a. Project has been completed. (Approximate date of completion \_\_\_\_\_).
- b. Project was never undertaken and will not be undertaken in the future.
- c. Project has not begun but may be undertaken in the future (approximate starting date \_\_\_\_\_).
- d. Project is in progress. (Approximate date of completion 8/1/18).

\*\*\*If you checked (a) or (b) above, skip to Item 12. If you checked (c) or (d), answer the rest of the questions.

TO: Brandie Disberger Protocol Number: 8884

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair   
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: June 14, 2018

RE: Approval of Your Proposal Entitled, "Examining the Needs of Agriculture Teachers and their Attitude towards Teaching."

Federal regulations stipulate that human subjects protocols can be approved by IRB's for only one year, and require "continuing review" and approval to continue past the expiration date.

On the basis of the IRB "continuing review," your project is classified as follows:

**Active.** The activity is pending or in progress, and there have been no changes that have occurred or are contemplated that would affect the status of human subjects.

**EXPIRATION DATE: 8/1/2019**

If the activity persists, it will be eligible for continuing review several months prior to the new expiration date.



## Appendix B - Participant Invitation

Greetings 1<sup>st</sup> year Ag Teachers-

I hope this note finds you having a great experience in your first week(s) of school. As you know, we have a very exciting semester here at KSU with our new faculty members and I am excited to begin my work towards my PhD. I have always had a passion for preparing and supporting novice agriculture teachers, so it is a natural fit for me to focus my research on the needs of 1<sup>st</sup> year agriculture teachers. I am planning to begin my research with a pilot study this fall focusing on KSU graduates who are in their first year of teaching agriculture in a Kansas High School. This could provide a unique opportunity for you if you choose to participate.

I am hoping to visit the schools of 1<sup>st</sup> year teachers who are KSU graduates between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> weeks of school to spend part of a day with you. During that day I hope to see you teach, tour your facilities and meet an administrator of your choice, and conduct a short interview. After that visit, I hope to conduct an interview with 1<sup>st</sup> year teachers for not longer than one hour each month to learn about your successes and challenges on a monthly basis. My hope is that I can also offer advice and support after the interview if you wish.

If you would be willing to have me visit your school and interview you each month by phone call (for one hour or less) this school year, could you please respond with the following information?

1. When was your first day of school?
2. Are there days of the week it would work better for me to visit? Are mornings or afternoons better?

Thank you for considering this opportunity, regardless of your choice to be involved in this project, please know the KSU Ag Ed Faculty are here to support you through this year of transition and excitement.

Brandie Disberger  
Instructor of Agricultural Education  
Department of Communications and Agricultural Education  
Kansas State University  
[bdis@ksu.edu](mailto:bdis@ksu.edu)  
[785/532-1175](tel:7855321175)



## Appendix C - Informed Consent

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### Examining the needs of 1<sup>st</sup> year Agriculture Teachers and their Attitudes toward Teaching

Dear Agriculture Teacher,

As you know, many parties are invested in the success of novice agriculture teachers. In order to learn how to best prepare future teachers and support novice teachers, we would appreciate your assistance by participating in this research study, “Examining the needs of 1<sup>st</sup> year Agriculture Teachers and their Attitudes Toward Teaching” as part of my graduate degree program. You are invited to join this study because you are a May 2016 graduate of Kansas State University’s Agricultural Education program and because you are currently employed as an agriculture teacher in Kansas. This study will involve a ½ day site visit to your school before mid-October followed by 8-9 monthly phone interviews. The site visit will include a tour of your facilities, a meeting with you and an administrator, an observation of your teaching and an interview. The following monthly interviews will happen during a consistent, predetermined time and last approximately one hour. The interviews will discuss your current challenges and successes as an agriculture educator.

Any information reported from this study will be reported anonymously. Audio files of our conversations will be stored in a locked cabinet until transcribed. During transcription, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and the files will be stored on a password protected University computer. You will receive a transcript of your interview for you to review and ensure your thoughts were accurately represented. If you have questions about your rights concerning this study, please contact Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224. You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so without penalty.

Your cooperation will enable the researcher to gain valuable insights into successes and challenges of novice agriculture teachers in Kansas. The data gained during this pilot study will refine an interview protocol and other procedures to be used on a longer-term study in the future. The data will be used to improve the undergraduate agricultural education program at Kansas State University and to recommend components that should be included in a novice teacher program to support individuals new to the profession.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Brandie Disberger ([bdis@ksu.edu](mailto:bdis@ksu.edu)) or Shannon Washburn ([sgw@ksu.edu](mailto:sgw@ksu.edu)) by email. The results of this study will be made available to you at the conclusion of this study.

Sincerely,

Brandie Disberger  
Instructor/Graduate Student

Shannon Washburn  
Professor

**I have read the procedure described above. I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily give my consent to participate in Brandie Disberger’s study under the direction of Dr. Shannon Washburn, designed to learn about successes and challenges faced by novice agriculture teachers in Kansas. Participation involves no additional work requirements for completion and no compensation. I have received a copy of this description and volunteer to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participating Teacher Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix D - Monthly Interview Protocol

Remind the participant the discussion will be divided into two sections, an information gathering session which can then be followed by further informal discussion if participants choose. Researcher should remember to re-direct the participant to local mentors in their school district and agricultural education profession to foster peer mentoring relationships and attempt to prevent this project from replacing mentoring relationships that would otherwise develop organically. Note information about the mentoring discussions that may follow the information gathering session, topics discussed, if they are reaching out to other mentors, etc. Additional probing questions may be incorporated as needed to help the researcher clarify questions or keep the interview on topic.

### Monthly Interview Questions

1. Describe your feelings about teaching using one word. What has shaped those feelings?
2. What successes have you experienced?
3. What challenges have you faced?
4. What are you looking forward to in the next month?
5. What concerns do you have in the next month?
6. Describe your recent experiences with...
  - a. Student Relationships
  - b. Curriculum and Planning
  - c. Managing the agricultural education program
  - d. Work/Life Balance
  - e. School Culture
  - f. Community Culture
7. Have you recently talked with a mentor or peer in education?
  - a. If yes, what did you discuss with them?
  - b. Was that conversation helpful? If so, how?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences so far?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

\*Years 2 and 3 was adjusted to start with the question “How are things going” before diving right into the first interview question.

## Appendix E - Focus Group Moderator Guides

### **Moderator's Guide for Teacher Focus Group – Year 1**

**Moderator reads:** Hello and welcome to our session today. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion about your year of teaching agriculture education in Kansas. My name is Brandie Disberger and I am an instructor in Agricultural Education. You were selected for this focus group because you are a May 2016 graduate of Kansas State University in Agricultural Education who has been teaching in Kansas and you communicated an interest in helping me research the experiences of first year agriculture teachers in Kansas.

Before we begin, let me share some things that will make our discussions easier. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please speak up and only one person should talk at a time. We are tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We will be on a first-name basis, and in our later reports there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of confidentiality.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I won't be participating in the conversation, but I want you to feel free to talk with one another. I will be asking around 15 questions, and I will be moving the discussion from one question to the next. There is a tendency in these discussions for some people to talk a lot and some people not to say much. But it is important for us to hear from each of you today because you have different experiences. So, if one of you is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others respond. And if you are not saying much, I may ask for your opinion.

Our session will last about one hour. If you have your cell phone on, please set it to silent at this time. Let us begin.

First, please take a few minutes to reflect on the questions on the reflection guide in front of you, please take a few minutes to gather your thoughts on that paper.

I will now ask a series of questions regarding your experiences and opinions. Please respond to each other's feedback as you answer these questions.

1. How has technology in the classroom been an asset and/or hindrance to teaching?
2. Describe your experiences with curriculum and planning throughout your first year.
3. What have been your experiences with student relationships over your year of teaching?

4. What have been your experiences with Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE's)?
5. Describe your experiences settling into the community.
6. What have been your experiences working with school administration?
7. What have been your experiences with Work/Life balance?
8. How did the focus and use of your time shift throughout the year?
9. What were your experiences working with mentor and peers in education?
10. Do you feel respected as a professional? Why or why not?
11. How did the monthly conversations impact your professional development?
12. How did the site visit impact how you talked about your experiences over the course of the year?
13. Is there anything you wish you would have known or had as a first-year teacher?
14. What advice would you give to first year teachers based on your experiences?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your first year of teaching?

## **Moderator's Guide for Teacher Focus Group – Year 2**

**Moderator reads:** Hello and welcome to our session today. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion about your second year of teaching agriculture education in Kansas. My name is Brandie Disberger and I am an instructor in Agricultural Education. You were selected for this focus group because you are a May 2016 graduate of Kansas State University in Agricultural Education who has been teaching in Kansas and you communicated an interest in helping research the experiences of first year agriculture teachers in Kansas.

Before we begin, let me share some things that will make our discussions easier. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please speak up and only one person should talk at a time. We are tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We will be on a first-name basis, and in our later reports there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of confidentiality.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I won't be participating in the conversation, but I want you to feel free to talk with one another. I will be asking around 15 questions, and I will be moving the discussion from one question to the next. There is a tendency in these discussions for some people to talk a lot and some people not to say much. But it is important for us to hear from each of you today because you have different experiences. So if one of you is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others respond. And if you aren't saying much, I may ask for your opinion.

Our session will last about one hour. If you have your cell phone on, please set it to silent at this time. Let's begin.

First, please take a few minutes to reflect on the questions on the reflection guide that you have already complete and have it in front of you,

I will now ask a series of questions regarding your experiences and opinions. Please respond to each other's feedback as you answer these questions.

1. What's on your mind? Considering your high's and lows about your year what would you like to share?
2. Describe your experiences to your first year, how were they similar and different?

3. What surprised you most?
4. What did you wish you would have known?
5. Many of you took in supplemental contracts in addition to FFA, what motivated you to do so? What were your experiences like because of this?
6. A few of you moved schools between year one and two, how did that impact your experience as a second-year teacher?
7. How did the monthly conversations impact your professional development?
8. Is there anything you wish you would have known/had/or done as a FIRST-year teacher that you know now?
9. What has been your biggest area of growth this year?
10. How do you plan to continue to grow as a professional?
11. What advice would you give to novice year teachers based on your experiences?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your second year of teaching?
13. As we look on to year three, their final year of this project, what are some things we should discuss each month?

### **Moderator's Guide for Teacher Focus Group – Year 3**

**Moderator reads:** Hello and welcome to our session today. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion about your second year of teaching agriculture education in Kansas. As you know, I am Brandie Disberger and I am an instructor in Agricultural Education. You were selected for this focus group because you are a May 2016 graduate of Kansas State University in Agricultural Education who has been teaching in Kansas and you communicated an interest in helping research the experiences of first year agriculture teachers in Kansas.

Before we begin, let me share some things that will make our discussions easier. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please speak up and only one person should talk at a time. We are tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. We will be on a first-name basis, and in our later reports there will not be any names attached to comments. You may be assured of confidentiality.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I won't be participating in the conversation, but I want you to feel free to talk with one another. I will be asking around 15 questions, and I will be moving the discussion from one question to the next. There is a tendency in these discussions for some people to talk a lot and some people not to say much. But it is important for us to hear from each of you today because you have different experiences. So if one of you is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others respond. And if you aren't saying much, I may ask for your opinion.

Our session will last about one hour. If you have your cell phone on, please set it to silent at this time. Let's begin.

First, please take a few minutes to reflect on the questions on the reflection guide that you have already complete and have it in front of you,

I will now ask a series of questions regarding your experiences and opinions. Please respond to each other's feedback as you answer these questions.

1. What's on your mind? Considering your high's and lows about your year what would you like to share?



2. Describe your experiences compared to your first and second years, how were they similar and different?
3. What has been your biggest area of growth this year?
4. How do you plan to continue to grow as a professional?
5. Do you consider yourself a novice teacher now that you have completed three years of teaching?
6. Many of you spoke about moving into more of a mentor role rather than a mentee role – describe those experiences. If that was the case, were you ready for that role?
7. What do you still have to learn?
8. What areas do you feel accomplished in as a teacher?
9. Based on your experiences, how do you measure your success as a teacher? How do you want others to measure your success?
10. What factors impact how you feel about your profession?
11. How did the monthly phone calls and visit impact your 1<sup>st</sup> three years of teaching?
12. How did this process impact your reflection?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your third year of teaching or this project as a whole?

## Appendix F - Annual Reflection Guide

### Annual Reflection Guide

Take a moment to respond to the following question by writing your thoughts on this paper.

1. What were your successes during your year of teaching?
2. What were your challenges during your year of teaching?
3. What are you looking forward to during the next year of teaching?
4. What do you anticipate being your challenges during the year to come?

## Charting the Highs and Lows of Your First Year that Affected your Attitude Toward Teaching

Directions: identify the points during the year you remember highs and lows, locate them on the chart with a short title or summary of the event.



## Appendix G - Coding Guide

Name	Description
Program Management	All topics broadly related to agricultural education excluding community, personal and school specific items.
Program Change	Presence of or absence of change in the FFA program, including student types and what the FFA Chapter does as well
Co-Teacher	Relationships with other ag teacher in the same program.
Facilities and equipment	Challenges or advantages due to facilities and equipment in the program
FFA	General statements related to FFA as a whole.
Instruction	Experiences related to classroom instruction.
Assessment & Student Learning	How students are assessed in the classroom.
Curriculum	General statement about how they plan curriculum. Presence or lack of resources and includes aligning with events and activities
Student Management	General successes or challenges related to managing student in the Ag Ed program
Ag Ed Mentor	Ag Ed related mentor
Professional Development	Reflection of or plans for professional development
SAE	Evidence or lack of evidence related to SAE development
Student Relationships	A desire or evidence of building relationships with students
Time Management	Successes and challenges related to maintaining the Ag Ed program responsibilities related to time
Attitude	

Name	Description
Negative	Negative toned response
One Word	The word they selected to describe their feelings toward teaching
Positive	Positive toned response
Community	All experiences related to the community in which the school is located, or they live.
Ag Ed Role	The role of the Ag Ed program in the community
Community Support	Evidence of support or lack of support from the community
Future Plans in Community	Evidence of planning for future community relationships
Involvement	Evidence the teacher has or has not gotten involved in the community outside the Ag Ed program or schools
Parent Relationships	Positive or negative interactions with parents
Personal	All items related to the teacher's personal life.
Personal Future Plans	Evidence they are thinking about their own future plans either as a teacher in this school or not
Reflection	reflection on previous experiences
Stress Factors	Factors of stress they are dealing with that may include finances, housing, spouse jobs, teaching exams, etc.
Work/life Balance	Evidence of or lack of personal and professional satisfaction.
School	All experiences related to the school system in which they teach.
Additional Responsibilities	Evidence they have taken on additional responsibilities in the school outside traditional Ag Ed and FFA roles.
Administration	Evidence of a positive or negative relationship with administration

Name	Description
Communication	Evidence of presence or lack of communication within the school
Faculty and Staff	Evidence of a positive or negative atmosphere among faculty in the school
Funding	Positive or negative experiences related to funding the Ag Ed program (not FFA fundraising)
School Mentors	Formal and informal mentors within the school and ways they may become mentors
Students	The general feeling of students in the school, not necessarily those in the Ag Ed program
Traditions	Evidence of or lack of traditions in the school and how they compare to what the teachers would expect