

A Grounded Theory Description of Novice Urban Agriculture Teachers' Career Experiences

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Abstract

The expansion of Agricultural Education programs in urban schools can assist in the effort to increase and diversify student enrollment and promote agricultural literacy among urban students. In order for this effort to be successful, it is necessary to have agriculture teachers who are eager to pursue and maintain teaching positions in urban districts. This qualitative study sought to examine the characteristics that influenced nine preservice teachers' decisions to teach in an urban school, their urban teaching experiences, and their decisions to continue their teaching career in an urban school. From the data analysis, a grounded theory was developed to illustrate the multiple influences that made varying impacts on the past, present, and future career experiences of the nine novice urban agriculture teachers who participated in the study.

Introduction

In an attempt to increase the number of Agricultural Education programs, diversify the enrollment of Agricultural Education students to reflect the general student population, and promote agricultural literacy among urban students, it is imperative to establish more agriculture programs in urban areas. As a result, there must be an adequate supply of agriculture teachers who are willing to pursue and maintain teaching positions in urban schools. Due to the high attrition rates of novice teachers, it is important to examine why beginning teachers choose to teach in urban schools and the influences on their teaching tenure in urban locations. Minimal research has been conducted on Agricultural Education in urban schools. Current literature focuses primarily on urban Agricultural Education *students*. The factors that influence agriculture teachers' decisions to obtain employment in an urban school, the unique experiences of urban agriculture teachers, and agriculture teachers' expectations of their future teaching careers in urban schools have not been previously examined in the Agricultural Education literature.

Prospective teachers have been found to highly value the location of schools when searching for employment and traditionally tend to seek jobs in schools very close to where they were raised (Zimpher, 1988). Due to the rural or suburban upbringing of many preservice teachers, they are often disinclined to consider teaching positions in urban areas (Gilbert, 1995). Many prospective teachers believe that returning to their hometown or a nearby area will increase their rapport with students due to similar backgrounds and comparable school experience (Werner, 1993). Also, preservice teachers from rural/suburban backgrounds feel they would be more efficacious when teaching in school environments similar to their own (Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999).

The perceptions and beliefs of preservice teachers could support their aversion to teaching in urban schools. Literature documents the beliefs that preservice teachers had regarding urban students (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995; Gilbert, 1997; Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996), the parents of urban students (Aaronsohn et al., 1995; Socoski & Hynes, 1991), urban teachers (Aaronsohn et al., 1995; Gilbert, 1997; Socoski & Hynes, 1991; Tiezzi & Cross, 1997), the urban school context (Aaronsohn et al., 1995, Gilbert, 1997), and cultural diversity (Dee & Henkin, 2002; Gilbert, 1995; Larke, 1990; Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996). The inclusion of field experiences in teacher preparation courses challenged some of the pre-existing beliefs of preservice teachers (Heinemann, Obi, Pagano, & Weiner, 1992; Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Wolffe, 1996) and encouraged some preservice teachers to consider teaching positions in urban schools (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Pagano, Weiner, Obi, & Swearingen, 1995). Also, field experiences exposed preservice teachers to the cultural diversity commonly found in urban classrooms (Garmon, 2004).

There are multiple influences on teachers' decisions to teach. Teachers commonly cite the impact of altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic reasons on their career decisions (Hayes, 1990; King, 1993; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Lortie, 1975; Morales, 1994; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001). Preservice teachers are often attracted to urban schools because they feel they are able to make a contribution to society by assisting with the academic growth of urban students (Olsen & Anderson, 2004; Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001). Other factors that encouraged preservice teachers to accept teaching positions in urban schools included job opportunities, desire for personal challenge, increased quality of life, and possibility of a higher income (Gilbert, 1995). Most of the research literature on individuals' decisions to teach Agricultural Education focus on academic measures such as standardized test scores and grades (McCoy & Mortensen, 1983; Muller & Miller, 1993; Wardlow, 1986). However, Hovatter (2002) reported that Agricultural Education preservice teachers were drawn to the profession by a desire to work with students.

Teacher retention is a challenge facing the education profession. Research reports have indicated a high percentage of teacher attrition (Henke, Zahn, & Carroll, 2001). Teachers who continued to teach reported high levels of self-efficacy, support from administration, desire to participate in professional development offerings, opportunity to influence the lives of students, and personal benefits (Johnson & Birkeland, 2002; Wilhelm Dewhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000). Agricultural Education teachers were encouraged to continue in their profession by the opportunity to work with students, people in the community, and remain in a particular teaching environment (Reilly & Welton, 1980). The influence of agriculture teachers' teacher preparation courses and the success of their first year of teaching also contributed to their decisions to continue teaching (Cole, 1984; Grady, 1990). Similarly, teachers in urban schools credited rapport with students and confidence in the classroom for their decisions to continue teaching (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Shann, 1998).

Purpose

To advance efforts to place and retain agriculture teachers in urban districts, research is needed on the distinct characteristics of Agricultural Education programs in urban schools and how these characteristics influence preservice teachers' decisions to teach in an urban school,

their urban teaching experiences, and their decisions to continue their teaching careers in urban schools. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the decisions of agriculture teachers to pursue and remain in urban teaching positions.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was utilized for this study. As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (p.2)

More specifically, in-depth interviews were used to develop an understanding of career decisions of urban Agricultural Education teachers by exploring: factors influencing the teachers' decisions to accept teaching positions in urban schools, the teachers' experiences while teaching in an urban school, and the teacher's outlook on their future career within an urban school context. One-on-one on-site interviews were conducted with nine individuals who had graduated from a teacher education program and had been teaching in an urban school for one to six years. Interview duration with each participant ranged from one to two hours in length. Selected excerpts from these interviews are presented in the findings section of this manuscript with pseudonymous references to participants.

Member checks, peer/colleague examination, and the creation of a subjectivity statement were used in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the current study. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher articulated her personal experiences and biases so that the reader would better understand the interpretation of the data (this was conducted as part of a larger study and is not included herein due to space limitations). After the interviews were transcribed, participants were asked to complete a member check and verify the accuracy of the transcripts. Throughout the process of axial coding and selective coding and during the stages of theory development, a colleague scrutinized the data and critiqued the emerging theory and research findings (Merriam, 1995).

Dependability seeks to ensure the findings of a study reflect the data collected from the interview participants. In addition to using peer examinations, an audit trail was maintained to establish consistency between the interview data and the proposed findings (Merriam, 1995). The researcher documented the data collection process, the development of the open codes, selective codes, and axial codes, the progression of theory development, and any other decisions pertinent to the research process (Merriam, 1998).

While quantitative research stresses the importance of generalizability, the goal of the qualitative approach is "to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of many" (Merriam, 1995, p.57). In order to achieve a sound understanding of the research, thick description was used to detail the participants' beliefs and experiences. The

inclusion of detailed description is intended to allow readers to easily transfer the research findings to comparable situations (Merriam, 1995).

Findings and Discussion

From the data analysis, a grounded theory was developed to describe the career experiences of the nine novice urban agriculture teachers who participated in the study. Strauss and Corbin (1990), defined grounded theory as,

A theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (p. 23).

Charmaz (2003) stressed the importance of using the analyzed data to create theoretical categories instead of trying to “fit” the data into pre-existing categories. She also alluded to the adaptive nature of grounded theory, “grounded theory is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 252). While a reference citing a specific number of participants needed to create a grounded theory was unattainable, Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasized the importance of theoretical saturation. In order to reach saturation, the researcher used probing questions for continued expansion of the participants’ responses, until new and relevant information was no longer provided by the participants. The grounded theory presented conceptually in Figure A illustrates the multiple influences that made varying impacts on the participants’ past, present, and future career experiences. The conclusions and recommendations for future practice and research are presented throughout the discussion.

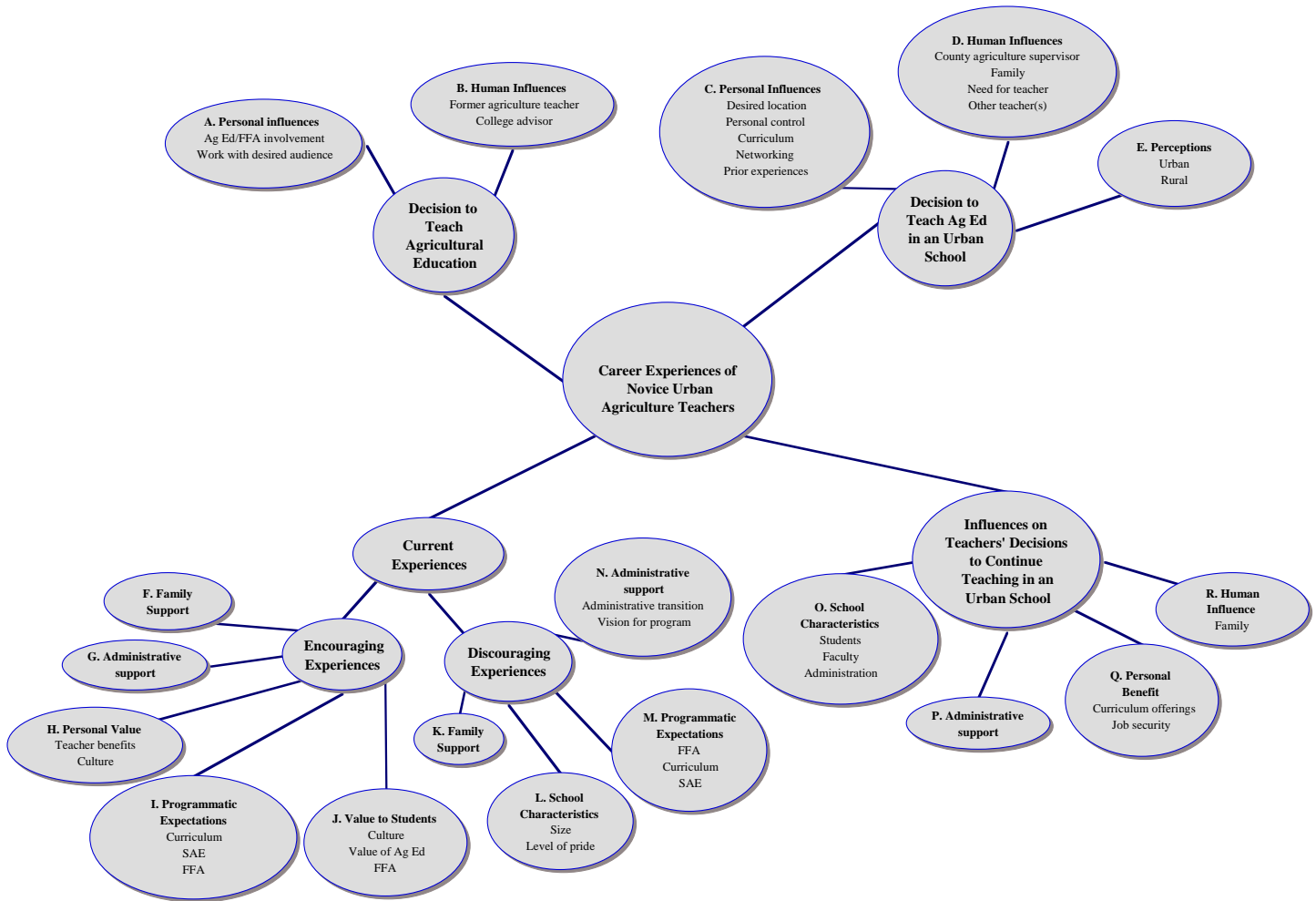


Figure A. Grounded theory of the career experiences of novice urban agriculture teachers

The personal influences and human influences that encouraged the participants' decisions to teach Agricultural Education are included in Circle A and Circle B of Figure A. The positive experiences that the participants had while they were Agricultural Education students and FFA members inspired them to pursue a teaching career. The chance to work with children and animals was also identified as an influence. Former agriculture teachers and college advisors were the primary human influences that led to the participants' career decisions.

Of the nine participants, only one, Mr. Flood, grew up in a metropolitan area. When reflecting on his own experiences as a student, he recalled the day he first entered his middle school agriculture class, he "knew nothing about agriculture at all." Through his involvement in Agricultural Education, Mr. Flood developed a "love for the field of agriculture", which helped encourage his decision to become an agriculture teacher. It is important to examine the reaction that more urban students have to the Agricultural Education curriculum. Expansion of Agricultural Education programs in urban areas will not only increase the number of students interested in agriculture, but will also expand the pool of prospective urban agriculture teachers.

Quality agriculture teachers are needed to attract students to urban programs and help students develop and sustain their interests in agriculture. Current urban agriculture teachers who have had numerous students pursue careers in Agricultural Education could assist new urban agriculture teachers in creating and delivering an Agricultural Education program that supports students' interests in agriculture and encourages their entry into the teaching profession.

The impact of a former agriculture teacher was very important to several of the participants. In high school, when Mr. Flood was certain he did not want to become an agriculture teacher, his agriculture teachers were able to promote the benefits of the profession and convince him to consider a teaching career. Similar to Ms. Brown, high school students may experience some confusion about their future career path and seek out their agriculture teacher for advice. The career guidance provided by agriculture teachers can help students identify future career possibilities. The participants expressed a level of respect and appreciation for their former agriculture teachers and felt they would be able to make a similar impact on the lives of their students. Due to the agriculture teacher's role in the career decisions of his/her students, it is imperative for agriculture teachers to promote a positive image of the teaching profession. When reflecting on what she enjoyed about teaching, Ms. Brown stated "it's so much fun coming here." Students may be unaware of the personal satisfaction derived from teaching, so agriculture teachers need to explicitly share with their students the many intrinsic benefits associated with the profession.

In addition to marketing programs to high school agriculture students, University Agricultural Education departments also need to market programs to agriculture teachers to equip them as an initial source of information for their students. As was previously mentioned, Ms. Brown was unsure about her future career and her agriculture teacher "told me you should be an ag teacher." If agriculture teachers are knowledgeable of the teacher education courses and requirements, as well as the career opportunities for graduates, they can encourage students to major in Agricultural Education. Also, if agriculture teachers have an established rapport with Agricultural Education faculty they have identifiable contacts to whom they can refer their students for advice on potential majors and careers within Agricultural Education.

College advisors were important in the career decision process, especially to individuals who had no prior involvement in Agricultural Education or who were pursuing another major. Even though Ms. Campbell was hesitant about the idea of becoming a teacher, her advisor in the Food Science and Human Nutrition department encouraged her to visit several agriculture programs and changed her career outlook. It is important for faculty advisors in University Agricultural Education departments to establish and maintain relationships with faculty advisors in other departments so they remain current about career opportunities in Agricultural Education and can refer potential students to appropriate contacts within the Agricultural Education department.

Additionally, encouraging prospective Agricultural Education majors with no prior experience in school-based agriculture programs to visit school sites can be an effective recruiting tool. Initially, Ms. Brown was reluctant to pursue a teaching career because she "didn't want to be stuck in a classroom." For individuals who may cite similar reasons for their aversion to teaching, the opportunity to visit an agriculture classroom may modify their existing beliefs

about teaching agriculture. Through such visits, prospective teachers can gain an understanding of the scope of the Agricultural Education curriculum, the numerous opportunities for the inclusion of hands-on activities and application of subject matter, and student engagement through FFA and SAE. Some prospective teachers may question their ability to teach Agricultural Education because they did not grow up on a farm or have had little exposure to production agriculture. Visits to agriculture programs could help dispel the beliefs that these individuals have about their inability to teach Agricultural Education.

The personal influences relevant to the participants' decisions to teach Agricultural Education in urban schools are depicted in Circle C of Figure A. Several participants expressed a desire to live and teach in an urban area. The participants were also drawn to an urban school by the opportunity to start their own program and teach a specific curriculum, such as plant biotechnology or veterinary science. Also, the established social and professional networks in urban areas supported the participants' decisions to accept teaching positions in urban schools. While prior experiences such as field experiences and student teaching experiences encouraged some of the participants to teach in an urban school, such experiences did not discourage participants from urban teaching careers.

Prior research has documented the influence of field experiences and teaching internship experiences on preservice teachers' attitudes towards the urban school environment (Fry & McKinney, 1997; Haberman & Post, 1992; Heinemann et al., 1992; Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Pagano et al., 1995; Rushton, 2000; Rushton, 2003; Wolffe, 1996). The participants had varying degrees of prior experience in urban schools. Of the nine participants, four completed teaching internships in urban schools. Two of the participants discussed the contribution of their internship experience to their decision to teach in an urban school. Ms. Brown felt her internship helped prepare her to teach the culturally diverse student population of the school where she would be teaching. Ms. Brown enjoyed working with the ethnically diverse students at her student teaching site and wanted the opportunity to teach in a diverse school. Although he grew up in a rural area, Mr. Linder wanted to teach in an urban area, but was uncertain of a future career in Agricultural Education. He found his teaching internship to be "very, very productive" and enjoyed his experience because he was "able to see from a different perspective how much children can be helped by Agricultural Education." Additional research is needed to explore if these types of experiences had any influence on teachers who would not consider teaching in an urban school.

In Circle D, the human influences related to the participants' decisions to seek employment in urban schools are noted. Participants responded to the publicized need for an agriculture teacher at a particular urban school and were actively recruited by the county supervisor for Agricultural Education. Without the publicized need for an agriculture teacher in these various schools, the participants would have been unaware of the job opportunities. It is important that the job openings in urban schools are well publicized through personal communication, job posting boards at universities, and job listings on the websites of professional organizations. The participants' families also supported their move to an urban location. This level of support was evidenced by the spouses' willingness to relocate to a completely new area and pursue education at a different institution. If preservice teachers' spouses question the possibility of teaching in an urban school, they should be invited to tour the

school facilities and provided with more information about the program. Mr. Gall's spouse was allowed to participate in the interview process. As a result, she recognized the benefits of the teaching position and supported her husband's decision to accept the job.

The perceptions that the participants held about urban and rural schools are included in Circle E. The few expectations that the participants had about the school climate and student demographics did not discourage their career decisions. Also, as a group, the participants discovered their prior beliefs were inaccurate. University Agricultural Education faculty could help future teachers formulate more accurate ideas regarding the urban school context by inviting novice urban teachers to speak to preservice teachers about the beliefs they had prior to beginning their urban teaching career and the realities of their current teaching career. The participants' perceptions regarding rural schools reinforced their decisions to teach in urban schools. It is important that preservice teachers feel confident in their ability to teach students from all backgrounds. Teacher education programs need to make efforts to assist preservice teachers in enhancing their level of efficacy so they will feel confident in the delivery of an engaging and relevant agriculture curriculum to any student audience. During teacher preparation courses, preservice teachers should discuss relevant curriculum topics and activities for various student audiences. Additionally, the preservice teachers could develop and deliver lessons appropriate for different audiences in a clinical setting. The completion of early field experiences in middle and high school classrooms in rural and urban settings could assist preservice teachers in developing the necessary confidence to teach agriculture to a diverse student audience.

The current experiences of novice agriculture teachers in urban schools were categorized into encouraging and discouraging experiences. The encouraging experiences could potentially support a teacher's decision to continue teaching at their current school, while a discouraging experience could potentially encourage a teacher to leave their current position. Some current experiences could either be considered encouraging or discouraging experiences.

The encouraging current experiences are illustrated in Circles F, G, H, I, and J. The participants found personal benefit in their ability to separate their personal life and their professional life and in contributing to the well-being of their students. As well, the presence of cultural diversity and its inclusion in the curriculum was beneficial to both the teachers and the students. The participants also stressed the value of Agricultural Education in educating urban students about the importance of agriculture. Participants were encouraged by the level of administrative support that they received for their programs, level of parental involvement, and the opportunity to make the curriculum and SAE meaningful for their students.

On a personal level, two of the participants felt they were able to separate their personal lives from their professional lives, something they did not think they would be able to achieve as easily if they were teaching in rural schools. Ms. Carter thought that in a rural area there would be constant pressure for Agricultural Education to be the foremost priority in an agriculture teacher's life, whereas she believed teaching in an urban area allowed the teacher much more personal freedom. Ms. Brown valued the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of her students. Since she felt that many of her students did not have appropriate role models within their families, she was willing to serve as a mother figure and role model to her students. As a result of the large proportion of non-traditional family structures among urban students, they may

be more likely to look to their teacher as a parental figure. Some agriculture students may even spend more time with their agriculture teachers than they do with their parents or guardians. Therefore, it is important for urban agriculture teachers to serve as role models for their students.

Participants from one urban district discussed how collaboration among the agriculture teachers in the district personally benefited them. They used the time during regularly scheduled meetings to share lesson plan ideas and resources. As relatively new teachers in the county, these meetings helped the participants feel supported by the experienced teachers in the county. This collaboration encouraged the teachers to develop personal relationships with each other that also enhanced their professional relationships. While the teachers in Ms. Taylor's county did not hold regular meetings, she was reassured by the level of assistance provided to her by the other teachers in her department. Ms. Taylor felt very comfortable going to any of her co-teachers with questions or for help. This finding reinforces the importance of mentoring among urban agriculture teachers. In addition to collaborating with other urban agriculture teachers within the same county, networking opportunities should be provided for urban teachers at professional meetings on the state and national level.

Culturally diverse student populations were evident in the participants' classrooms. The student enrollments in Agricultural Education were composed predominately of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic students. While Easter et al. (1999) and Werner (1993) report that teachers may question their ability to relate to students of different cultural backgrounds, two of the participants specifically sought out teaching positions that would allow them to work with a diverse group of students. These two participants and one additional participant acknowledged how much they enjoyed learning about the cultural heritage of their students and felt that the inclusion of culture in the classroom enhanced the learning environment.

Due to the ethnically diverse student populations found in urban schools, it is important for agriculture teachers to appreciate cultural diversity. Preservice agriculture teachers nationwide are predominately raised in rural hometowns that provide limited opportunities for exposure to cultural diversity. According to Rocca (2005), 86% of the preservice agriculture teachers who completed teaching internships in Fall 2005 were raised in a rural location. As a result, they may not recognize the contributions student diversity can make to the school environment. During early field experiences, preservice teachers should be provided the opportunity to work with diverse groups of students. These experiences could help preservice teachers develop a more thorough understanding and appreciation for culturally diverse classrooms. Additionally, preservice teachers should be encouraged to discuss, design, and present activities and lesson plans that allow students to showcase their unique heritages in the classroom.

When reviewing multiple research studies relevant to beginning teachers, Veenman (1984) concluded that one of the most common perceived problems of beginning teachers was classroom management. However, none of the participants in this study voiced a concern regarding student behavior. Most of the participants were very complimentary of the students enrolled in their agriculture classes. Mr. Linder stated, "these are the best kids that I have ever worked with and I've worked with over 250,000 kids." Another participant stated that she "liked

that most of her urban students entered her classroom with little prior knowledge of agriculture.” This limited amount of agricultural knowledge commonly contributed to the misperceptions that students had about agriculture. The students often associated agriculture strictly with farming and lacked an understanding of the broad scope of agriculture and its’ impact on their everyday lives. After overcoming their initial perceptions, many of the students were found to embrace the subject matter. One of the participants discussed the desire of her students to learn the material that was being taught in her agriculture classroom. Other participants related their students’ positive reactions to the subject matter with the opportunity to work in the greenhouse and interact with the classroom animals. Ms. Brown was able to observe one of her former students applying the subject matter from her agriculture class in her after-school job. Ms. Brown’s student worked at daycare and engaged the kids in landscaping. Preservice agriculture teachers may be reluctant to teach in an urban school because they do not think students will embrace the subject matter. The findings described above counter this sort of misperception and demonstrate that many urban students thoroughly enjoy their agriculture classes and are able to apply the agricultural concepts that they have learned in a variety of settings, such as their after-school jobs.

The discouraging current experiences are depicted in Circles K, L, M, and N. The administration’s value of the Agricultural Education program was continually viewed as being in a state of flux due to the high rate of administrative turnover and differing, and sometimes conflicting visions, for the Agricultural Education program. Lack of parental involvement and school characteristics such as school size and the level of pride in school were also identified as discouraging experiences. With the level of importance placed on FFA, attempts to overcome the multiple obstacles to student involvement in FFA was viewed as very discouraging. Also, participants described difficulties they faced with delivering an appropriate curriculum and identifying relevant SAE opportunities for urban students. However, these discouraging experiences may be considered encouraging experiences with the teachers’ abilities to maintain a successful Agricultural Education program in spite of the challenges.

With the rapid turnover of administration, several of the participants experienced fluctuating levels of support from administration. When Ms. Brown was initially hired, her principal was supportive of the agriculture program. However, that principal was replaced before the start of the school year by a principal who was not supportive of the program. After two years and another principal change, Ms. Brown felt that she received adequate assistance from her administrators. Likewise, most of the participants felt well supported by their school administration at the time data were collected. Two of the participants described the efforts they had made to garner support from their principals. The participants perceived their principals were primarily concerned with the standardized test performance of students, so in response the participants documented the standardized test scores of Agricultural Education students and the integration of other curriculum subjects into the agriculture curriculum. Teacher educators should model strategies that preservice teachers can use to assist students in preparation for standardized testing and for integrating other curriculum areas. Preservice teachers can also develop lesson plans that integrate other curriculum subjects to use during early field experiences and student teaching.

Principals, in cooperation with an administrative team, determine the course offerings for each specific urban middle and high school; therefore, it is important for administrators to have positive perceptions of agriculture classes. Kalme and Dyer (2000) found that secondary school principals in Iowa held favorable perceptions of agriculture programs, courses, and teachers. A similar study should be conducted to determine urban school administrators' beliefs about Agricultural Education in urban schools. Additionally, administrators who are reluctant to include Agricultural Education in the course offerings should be interviewed in an effort to further understand their perceptions of agriculture classes.

Three of the participants acknowledged how supportive their assistant principals were of the Agricultural Education program. Continual effort needs to be made to promote Agricultural Education to urban principals and encourage them to include Agricultural Education as part of the complete school curriculum. However, similar efforts should be made to involve assistant principals in Agricultural Education.

The participants identified several administrative obstacles that hindered the teacher's vision for the program. As was discussed previously, the transition of administrators led to varying levels of support for the Agricultural Education program. It was difficult for participants to establish rapport with administrators in the limited time they remained at the school. The level of administrative transition is increased in urban school districts where new schools are being opened every year. The opportunity for an administrative promotion or to work in a brand new school often draws administrators from their current schools.

The perceptions of county and school administrators challenged three of the participants' beliefs on the appropriate curriculum and necessary facilities for their programs. Although Mr. Hill's principal was a former agriculture teacher, Mr. Hill felt he expected the curriculum to be more traditional and emphasize production agriculture more than Mr. Hill preferred. Ms. Brown's principal had a different view of the agriculture class, which prevented her from housing any animals on campus. Her principal's aversion to raising small and large animals modified Ms. Brown's vision for the program and curriculum.

Additionally, in Mr. Gall's school district, a publication produced to inform the public about potential careers in agriculture reinforced the common perception that agriculture is simply farming, which was the specific perception he had been working to overcome. Urban teachers need to clearly articulate the vision they hold for their programs to their school and county administrators. Also, it is important for an urban agriculture teacher to publicize the activities and achievements of their students so administrators will be aware of the benefits of Agricultural Education.

All of the participant's schools had large student enrollments. The size of Ms. Brown's middle school resulted in an average of 30 students in each of her classes. Her portable classroom offered a limited amount of space, so she was unable to use many pieces of the equipment that was purchased for her classroom. In an attempt to utilize more of the classroom equipment and provide hands-on learning activities for students, Ms. Brown described her plans to include learning stations for her 6th- grade students. Each learning station would be specific to an agricultural topic and would contain relevant background information, activities, and

assignments that a group of students could complete in 1–2 days. Ms. Brown's goal for using stations would place her in more of a facilitative role rather than providing instruction to the whole class, but would encourage the increased use of classroom equipment. For example, if teaching about landscape design, it would be impossible for Ms. Brown to have her entire class use computer software to design a landscape. However, through the use of learning stations, a group of 4-5 students had the opportunity to create a landscape plan using the computer. The use of learning stations was an idea that Ms. Brown received from her cooperating teacher and may be very helpful to new teachers. To supplement the learning stations that have already been developed, preservice teachers could design additional stations with information, activities, and assignments that would be appropriate for various curriculum topics.

The influences on the participants' decisions to continue teaching in urban schools are included in Circles O, P, Q, and R. When asked to speculate on their future teaching career in their current school, the participants identified several influences that could potentially influence their career decisions. Two of the participants really enjoyed the particular curriculum they were teaching and wanted to continue teaching a similar curriculum in the future. Four participants identified their family as an important influence on their teaching location. For Ms. Brown, she was willing to relocate to a city, which had the best job opportunities for her husband. Mr. Gall felt that if he and his wife started a family while living in their current location, it would be difficult to move. While Mr. Linder enjoyed living in a metropolitan area, he wanted to eventually return to a rural area to raise a family.

As new schools are opened to provide relief for overcrowded schools, the draw of students from their current schools decreases the student enrollment, which results in the elimination of teaching positions. Two of the participants felt their jobs might be threatened based on a change in student enrollment in their current school. Mr. Flood stated that administrative support was a key factor in his decision to continue teaching at his current school. Ms. Fritz planned on staying in an urban school because she felt that Agricultural Education was desperately needed in urban areas. Of the nine participants, only one expressed his intention to leave his current school for a teaching position in another state. The factors the participants credited as influential in their anticipated career continuation in an urban school were merely speculative. Using the same participants, a longitudinal study would provide additional data about the factors that influenced their decision to either stay or depart from their current teaching site.

This paper has presented a number of suggestions based on the research which teacher educators and state staff will find useful in developing strategies to better prepare teachers for the career opportunities offered in urban Agricultural Education programs. Current urban agriculture teachers and faculty advisors also play an important role in this effort and should be provided with appropriate information and materials to share with potential teachers. Additionally, encouraging preservice teachers to visit urban programs and talk with urban agriculture teachers may provide new perspectives on teaching in an urban location. Finally, preservice teachers must have the opportunity to complete teaching experiences in various school settings to help them develop the confidence to teach agriculture to an increasingly diverse student population.

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