

Spring 2012

The Symbiotic Effects that Result from Collaboration Between the Agricultural Education Program and the Community

Ashlee E. Spannagel

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, ashlee.spannagel@gmail.com

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THE SYMBIOTIC EFFECTS THAT RESULT FROM COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND THE COMMUNITY

By

Ashlee E. Spannagel

B.S., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2010

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

Department of Plant, Soil Science, and Agricultural Systems
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2012

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Dr. Dexter B. Wakefield I, Chair

Dr. Seburn Pense

Dr. Dennis Watson

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 6, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Ashlee E. Spannagel, for the Master of Science degree in Plant, Soil Science, and Agricultural Systems on April 6, 2012 at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

THE SYMBIOTIC EFFECTS THAT RESULT FROM COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND THE COMMUNITY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Dexter B. Wakefield I

In today's educational atmosphere, it is critical that agricultural education programs be well-rounded and generate students of impeccable character and performance. To accomplish this, however, the agriculture program must utilize all available resources in order to enrich the lives of its students. The program must reach out to the surrounding community to obtain additional resources to reach its full capacity of performance.

The purpose of this study was to determine the scope of collaboration between communities and local agricultural education programs. This study was significant because it investigated and analyzed current collaborative measures that are being implemented within agricultural education programs and communities. This study found that positive collaborative efforts between agriculture programs and communities are fostering life-changing opportunities for students and creating civic-minded individuals as a result.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior for blessing me with talents and abilities. He has given me a drive and a passion to accomplish any goal I set my mind to.

Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant, never-ending support. No matter what my plans are in life, my family and friends are there to support me throughout each step of my journey. To my husband, you are my number one fan, best friend, and the person to which I turn for everything. Thank you for always being there no matter what life may throw our way. My parents and siblings have given me their support for the past twenty-two years. It is because of them that I am where I am today. For your constant support and push in the right direction, I will forever be grateful.

I would also like to thank the woman who instilled in me the passion for agricultural education. Mrs. Jennifer Timm, the agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Cisne High School, told me on my first day of high school that I would be able to leave my own mark on this world. It is because of Mrs. Timm that I have such a passion for agricultural education and a strong desire to see other students succeed in whatever life goals they have.

Finally, my accomplishments over the last four years would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of my professors at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Dr. Dexter Wakefield and Dr. Seburn Pense. You have helped me develop into the academia that I am today. Dr. Penny Hasse-Wittler has pushed me to always challenge myself. She has shown me that everything does not have to be perfect, but when you invest everything you are into each feat, everything will turn out just right.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural education can be an effective and successful way to meet the needs within the community. However, the needs of the community must be known for this to be accomplished (Croom, 2009). When an agricultural education program meets the needs of the community, involves community members in making decisions regarding the direction of the program, contributes to the well-being of the community, and stresses the importance of the interactions between the program and the community, it is considered part of a community school (Martin, Ball, & Connors, 2006).

A community school's primary function and purpose is to meet the needs of the people within its community. This type of school would prepare students through academics and extracurricular activities in the way that the community felt would be the most beneficial to the success of that community (Martin, Ball, & Connors, 2006). On the other hand, the primary goal of the community in which the agricultural education program is located is for the students to encounter success (Adams & Chester, 2009).

The success of an agricultural education program is dependent upon the collaborative relationships between the program and the surrounding community (Boone, 2010). The community can provide insight for what the ideal agricultural education program should look like in that individual community. The community can provide direction and support in the development of a successful agricultural education program (Adams & Chester, 2009). When communication and cooperation are present between the school and the community, great things can be accomplished (Martin, Ball, & Connors, 2006). This process is illustrated in Figure 1.

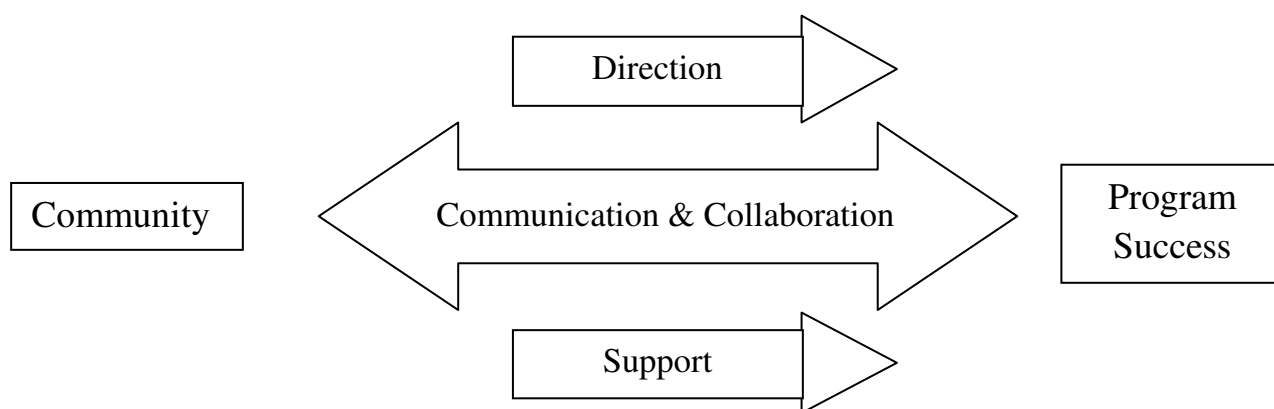


Figure 1: Relationship between community and program to foster success.

Although relationships will vary greatly depending on the demographics of the community in which the agricultural program is located, it is critical that collaborative partnerships must be formed (Wakefield & Lambrich, 2010). The effectiveness of an agricultural education program depends greatly upon the construction of its foundation through collaborative efforts within that community. The partnerships and relationships that are formed during that process will promote the success of that program. Additionally, these relationships will create a clear and bright future for the program. Without these partnerships, the agricultural education program has no hope of reaching its full potential (Estepp, Stripling, & Roberts, 2010). It will be through developing these partnerships that the school and community support and the overall quality and impact of the local program will become evident (Talbert, 2007).

Statement of Problem

Agricultural education programs depend upon the support of the local community to operate. However, it is unknown to what degree the local program and community should interact. Also, it is unknown the exact impact that collaboration between the community and program will accomplish.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the scope of collaboration between communities and local agricultural education programs. The methods of collaboration were examined to determine the effect on the success of the agricultural education program and the students within the program. This paper examined the interactions between the community and the local agricultural education program. Those interactions were examined to determine whether the community and the local program had a symbiotic relationship. The activities/methods of collaboration were examined to decide whether both entities benefit.

This study was critical because it analyzed the impact that collaboration within a local community had on the success of an agricultural education program. The expected outcome of this study was to identify the methods of collaboration that had been successful in the past that could be implemented in other agricultural education programs to improve the quality of agricultural education.

Objectives

1. Identify the impact collaboration has on the success of agricultural education programs and students within those programs.
2. Identify the importance of community support on the success of agricultural education programs.
3. Examine methods of collaboration that occur between agricultural education programs and the local community.
4. Examine the impact that service-learning and leadership development have on the community and the school.

Methodology

This review of related literature included sources from journal articles, agricultural magazine articles, and research textbooks that discuss the components of an agriculture program and how community support promotes a well-rounded educational program. The review of literature was split into several sections, which are as follows: the need for collaboration, utilizing community resources to create a well-rounded agricultural education program, the collaborative process, collaborative opportunities, organizations that will assist in collaborative efforts, and benefits students will receive.

Limitations

Limitations of this paper included the lack of studies that concentrated on success of students or an agricultural education program. The researcher found few studies that focused on the success of programs, but rather the qualities that programs instill in the students. Further and more in depth studies using research methods consisting of focus groups, surveys and interviews need to be completed in order to gain a greater understanding of the interactions between the community and the program to determine success.

Due to time restraints, surveys and questionnaires were not sent to agricultural educators or community leaders to fully examine the interactions between agricultural education programs and the community. If completed, this could have compared activity within different communities to determine the impact on the agricultural education program and student success.

Definition of Terms

In order to minimize misinterpretations that may occur due to the language utilized within this paper, the following definitions have been provided:

Community school – A school that meets the needs of the community it serves, involves citizens in problem solving and democratic decision making, builds community empowerment and beautification, and emphasizes interaction with the community to maximize the education delivered.

Community service – Volunteer activities that students participate in to meet a need within the community.

Service learning – Method under which students learn through active participation in meaningful, organized community service.

Experiential learning – Learning that takes place through personal experiences.

Agricultural education – instructional program found in today's public school system where instruction focuses on agriculture and leadership education

Collaboration – Working together to accomplish a common goal.

Symbiotic relationship – Relationship between two entities where both mutually benefit.

Life skills – Leadership life skills include leadership, teamwork, decision-making, problem solving, reasoning, and communication. Life skills that are personal qualities are responsibility, self-esteem, and integrity.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study revealed that with collaboration, a community and an agricultural education program can reach their greatest potential only when forming a positive and effective partnership. When schools work with civic organizations, governmental officials, businesses, and agencies they become powerful agents of change for students, families, and the neighborhoods around them. The same is true for agricultural education programs (Abromitis, 2009).

The Need for Collaboration

Presently, the success and overall stability of today's agriculture programs are at risk due to school districts facing unfortunate financial shortages (Martin et al., 2006).

“Budget cuts in many school districts across the nation as well as threats to state and national funding sources for career and technical education programs, such as the Perkins funding, have created economic burdens and threats to the sustainability of agricultural education programs at the secondary levels” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 14).

On the other hand, a school cannot provide all the necessary resources needed to support all of its programs even during a time of financial constancy. Therefore, a school district greatly benefits from utilizing community resources because the actual cost to be encountered by the school district will be minimized (Martin et al., 2006). According to Talbert (2007), a community resource is a resource found in the area served by the school that may be capable of supporting agricultural education in some way.

It is because of the diversity of today's agricultural industry that it is becoming imperative that agriculture programs seek after these supplemental resources within the

community. Through the identification of the resources within the community, the agriculture program will build a connection within the community (Talbert, 2007). Furthermore, through the use of community resources, the learning experiences will be enriched tremendously (Martin et al., 2006).

Utilizing Community Resources to Create a Well-Rounded Agricultural Education Program

Experiential Learning

According to Figure 2, a well-rounded agricultural education program consists of instruction, FFA, and SAE.

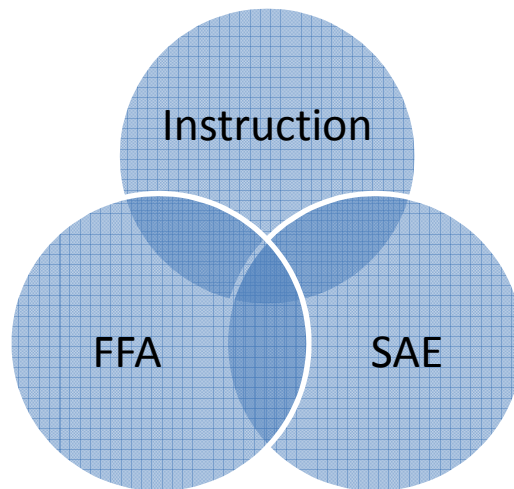


Figure 2: The agricultural education three-ring model.

Experiential learning is the key in developing that well-rounded educational program. Experiential learning can encompass several different methods of instruction. Instruction can include projects or assignments that students are responsible for completing. Once completed,

students will gain an understanding of the relevance of the topic because they have completed a hands-on project relating to the content they learned within the classroom (Adams & Chester, 2009).

Experiential learning includes five steps. “The steps include experience (do it), reflections (what happened), process (what’s important), generalize (so what), and application (now what)” (Phelps & Kotrlik, 2007, p.67). This process helps students to develop skills they will utilize throughout their lives. Students will learn these skills through posing questions, being curious, being creative, assuming responsibility, and forming their own conclusions. These students will learn more about themselves through completing this process.

As revealed through Figure 3, classroom instruction is the primary foundation of the agriculture program. However, when FFA, SAE, and community collaboration are also present, a truly well-rounded, effective, and successful agricultural education program will come alive (Croom, 2010).

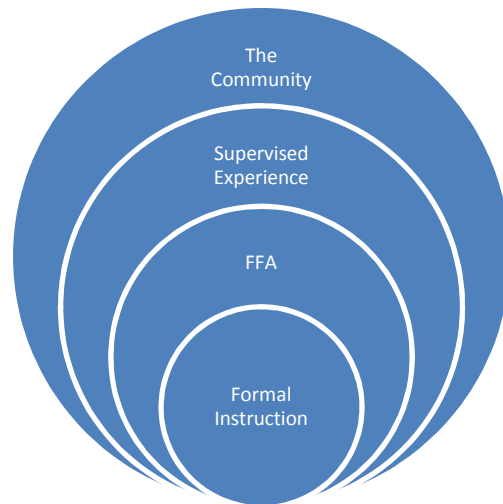


Figure 3: The Experiential Learning Model for delivering agricultural education. (Croom, 2010, p. 11)

Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs

Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs, or SAEs, are a critical component of the agricultural education program (Adams & Chester, 2009). “Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) is an independent learning program for students enrolled in agricultural education courses, and is designed to provide learning experiences for students in the agricultural career pathway of their choice” (Croom, 2010, p. 9). Through establishing community support, endless opportunities for student SAE enterprises will arise. These SAE opportunities will help prepare the student for a career within the community (Adams & Chester, 2009).

FFA

“The FFA is a means of connecting to the community” (Adams & Chester, 2009, p.6). FFA is a youth organization that focuses on the leadership development of students within agricultural education programs. Typically, agricultural education programs have been considered the key providers of leadership development within school systems. Leadership development is indeed a primary goal of an agricultural education program. An agriculture program strives to train students to be influential leaders within their community upon exiting the program (Byler, 1982). Students must be educated and prepared when entering the real-world. They must have essential knowledge and leadership skills required to perform the duties of leadership positions (Kelsey & Wall, 2003).

Students have the opportunity to attend workshops, conferences, competitions, and conventions to develop their leadership skills. These events can also help students develop as individuals (Croom, 2010). Career Development Events (CDE) provide an opportunity for

students to demonstrate experiential learning. Students can utilize knowledge and skills gained within the classroom setting and demonstrate the concept in a real-life application (Arnold & Igo, 2009).

Service Learning

Students participate in service-learning within their communities throughout their high school careers in the agricultural education program (Adams & Chester, 2009). Service-learning is an example of experiential learning. “Limited research has demonstrated that service-learning can be effective in helping students develop new attitudes and knowledge, as well as leadership life skills” (Stafford, Boyd, & Lindner, 2003, p. 11). Students will effectively learn and develop through participation in community service activities and events that are well-planned to meet needs of their communities (Phelps & Kotrlik, 2007). Service-learning projects will be more successful when students are able to clearly see needs within their communities. Once the needs are evident, students will gain much more from completing the service learning projects. Additionally, the students will gain the ability to see the needs of others more clearly. A shift in mindset will occur and the students will be able to focus on the needs of others rather than their own needs (Jones & Rayfield, 2009). It is because of community service activities that students will become “well-informed, critically-thinking, and civically-engaged citizenry” (Phelps & Kotrlik, 2007, p. 68).

The Collaborative Process

Collaboration between the agriculture program and the community is effective when there is a common goal and vision to be accomplished (Scott & Nichols, 2010). Mattessich and

Monsey (1992) identified nineteen factors that influence collaboration and grouped those factors into six categories: environment, membership characteristics, process/structure, communication, purpose and resources. According to Estepp, Stripling, & Roberts (2010), partnerships formed within the community are critical to not only the survival of the program, but also to the future success and vitality of the program. To ensure that flourishing partnerships are created, there are five basic steps to consider when building such partnerships.

1. Identify potential partners.
2. Determine the benefits of involvement for potential partners.
3. Present benefits of involvement to potential partners.
4. Establish a plan for involving core partners.
5. Reward partners by recognizing them for their contributions and support.

Collaborative Opportunities

“Traditionally, education is a community affair” (Martin et al., 2006, p. 16). It is the individuals within the community that assist in providing students with real-world learning experiences (Martin et al., 2006). The individuals within the community provide SAE opportunities and help train teams to compete in FFA CDEs. Community members come into the agriculture classroom and share their knowledge. They support program fundraisers and provide financial assistance in a multitude of ways (Croom, 2010). Additionally, students and the agriculture teacher alike can attend community, extension, or school board meetings to inform the public about the accomplishments and happenings of the agriculture program (English, Fuller, Monge, & Thompson, 2010).

Not only do these partnerships provide support for the program, but they also allow an opportunity for the students within the program to return the favor (English, Fuller, Monge & Thompson, 2010). Local governmental officials and community organizations provide community service opportunities for the students to take part in (Talbert, 2007).

Organizations that will Assist in Collaborative Efforts

Alumni Association

Members within the community that have a desire to support agricultural education can establish an alumni. Having a local alumni association can provide great stability within an agriculture program. “The mission of the National FFA Alumni Association is to secure the promise of FFA and agricultural education by creating an environment where people and communities can develop their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success” (Ricketts, 2010, p. 26). The members of the alumni understand and appreciate the diversity of today’s agricultural industry. These individuals can help obtain the resources needed to keep up with today’s industry. Also, they can provide insight of how to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. Local alumni chapters can assist in training judging teams, serve as chaperones for a field trip, offer employment opportunities, provide financial resources, and speak to students relating to different topics (Talbert, 2007).

Advisory Committees

Advisory committees can also be a source of stability for a program. These committees consist of various leaders from within the community. These individuals come from different

walks of life and different vocations. Therefore, they will also be able to guide the program by outlining the ideal agricultural curriculum to meet the communities needs (Phipps, 2008).

Benefits Students will Encounter

It is through collaborative relationships between the agriculture program and the community that students will encounter countless opportunities throughout their high school careers and also for the remainder of their lives. The students will gain connections to very important and beneficial resources. These connections could lead the students to future internships or careers, scholarships, or professional references. Students will become self-motivated and reliable citizens within the community (Adams & Chester, 2009). According to Dailey, Conroy & Shelley-Tolbert (2001), students will be able to process information more effectively. Additionally, agricultural education students will have exceptional social skills. Through their experiences within the agricultural education program, these students will become productive members of society (Dailey, Conroy, & Shelley-Tolbert, 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The researcher's intent of this study was to examine the components of an agricultural education program, identify methods of collaboration between the community and the program, and determine the effects that collaboration can potentially have on a program and the students thereof. The research from this study clearly demonstrated the relationships that are present between communities and agricultural education programs. Additionally, this study revealed the impact that these collaborative efforts can have on both the community and the program.

Although the research of the study demonstrated the opportunities for collaboration, proper techniques of collaboration, and effects of collaboration, it does not fully express the full impact that collaboration can have when implemented correctly. However, this study could be utilized as a point of reference for agriculture instructors and community leaders in order to initiate collaborative efforts between the two entities.

Furthermore, this study could be utilized as a reference point when conducting future research regarding collaboration between communities and the agricultural education program. Further research would benefit agricultural education programs by providing information of how to reach out to the community and form the most positive relationship possible in order to advance the program toward its full potential.

Recommendations

This study indicated that positive collaborative endeavors between the community and the agricultural education program create program and student success while improving the quality of the surrounding community. It is critical that the community and the program work

together to create a symbiotic relationship. However, in order to accomplish this feat, each entity must be fully educated on how to go about doing this effectively and efficiently.

It is recommended that the information presented throughout this study be implemented in teacher education programs. This information would provide in-service teachers with the knowledge needed to create a positive support system within the community of which they obtain a position. Additionally, this information would provide insight to community leaders and organizations of how to appropriately work with the local agriculture program.

In addition, it is imperative that agriculture programs that currently collaborate with the community provide appreciation and recognition for community contributions. This can be accomplished through an awards presentation at the chapter banquet, publishing news articles regarding the contribution, or sending thank you notes to the members of the community for their efforts. By expressing gratitude, the program can ensure a bright future full of community collaboration.

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VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Ashlee E. Spannagel

ashlee.spannagel@gmail.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Bachelor of Science, Plant, Soil Science, and Agricultural Systems – Agricultural Education,
May 2010

Title:

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Program and the Community

Major Professor: Dr. Dexter B. Wakefield I