SCHOOL-BASED AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

INSTRUCTORS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF

WELL-BEING

By

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Abstract:

The purpose of this Q methodology study was to explore Oklahoma school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers' perceptions of their well-being.

Twenty-four SBAE teachers from Oklahoma sorted a Q set of 40 statements related to well-being. Through centroid analysis and varimax rotation, two factors were identified for interpretation. Arrays, demographic information, field notes, and post-sort interviews were used to interpret the factors: the Network Builders and the Confident Connectors.

The Network Builders recognize abundant social support from their community and others in a profession that provides purpose to these educators. The Confident Connectors also recognize a natural social support that allows for a community embeddedness through strong family ties. Statements related to the discussion of mental health and potential irreversible tolls to physical health caused by work were sorted "most unlike" by these groups.

Findings indicate a strong social support system through family ties, community support, or a network of other educators may provide important aspects of SBAE teacher well-being.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a 2005 study, Giacometti-Meyers found stress, frustration, and anxiety are key influences on the retention of individuals in the education profession. This could be an accumulation of the hefty workload, personal as well as professional changes, and perhaps even a change in community (Bowers, 2004). The average teacher in the United States will teach somewhere between 30 and 40 years (Bowers, 2004). Many will enter the workforce not long out of their youth, meaning they will spend nearly the entirety of their adult life in the classroom (Bowers, 2004). Educators will bear the weight of the stress of their personal lives, work, and even some of their students' stresses which can lead to chronic stress (Giacometti-Meyers, 2005). This chronic stress can easily turn into depression, one of the leading reasons instructors leave the profession (Bowers, 2004). Prolonged stress can lead to the emotional exhaustion of teachers and aid in the decision to leave the teaching profession (Troman & Woods, 2001).

Although stress greatly impacts the mental state of teachers, it impacts their physical health as well (Bowers, 2004). Teacher stress may lead to physical well-being falling by the wayside, opening the door to physical stresses such as obesity and increased usage of sick days (Bowers, 2004; Schee & Gard, 2013). In addition, the chronic presence of stress, known as *job strain*, is shown to led to serious health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and weakened immune systems (Bowers, 2004).

Leading agricultural education programs can elicit additional stress, requiring teachers to take on mental, physical, and even emotional loads (Smith & Smalley, 2018). Terry and Briers (2010) listed 20 distinct roles of School-based Agricultural Education (SBAE) instructors, requiring them to regularly clock in more than the typical 40-hour work week. In a study of workload distribution, Torres et al. (2008) found SBAE teachers spend nearly as much of their work time on tasks that are supplemental to their time teaching class.

As SBAE instructors stretch to reach these roles, they often find themselves susceptible to various forms of risks that can cause stress (Morrow & Crum, 2004). Physical risks for SBAE teachers include injuries associated with livestock handling (Douphrate et al., 2009). Other risks are less obvious, such as driving fatigue (Morrow & Crum, 2004). Thieman et al. (2012) stated the SBAE teaching profession has shown to have high expectations that lead to high stress levels in its instructors. Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion has devastating impacts and can lead to the loss of teachers in this profession (Croom, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Although teachers often have a decades-long career (Bowers, 2004), the recruitment and retention of new instructors is a long-standing problem (Darling-Hammond & Stykes, 2003). Employment in education has long been referred to as a "revolving door" (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 751). This sentiment is not unfounded with nearly 30% of educators leaving the profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond & Stykes, 2003). A quarter of newly certified teachers never enter the profession (Darling-Hammond & Stykes, 2003). Coasman et al. (1999) recognized a nation-wide teacher shortage linked to low retention and a lack of new educators entering the classroom that had then lasted nearly 50 years. Previous research identified factors pertaining to mental health, such as stress and anxiety, as contributors impacting teachers

leaving the profession (Giacometti-Meyers, 2005); however, little research was found in the agricultural education literature addressing the holistic view of personal wellness.

In a study by Culbreth et al. (2005), job dissatisfaction as a result of fatigue, stress, and an overall poor well-being was a leading cause of teacher attrition. The inability to cope with daily and chronological stressors in this position will likely impair numerous teachers, causing them to leave the field completely (Curry & O'Brien, 2012). The early exit of so many instructors (Darling-Hammond & Stykes, 2003) costs public schools billions of dollars. In a pilot study comprised of five schools, an estimated $7 billion was spent to combat these losses and fill positions (Barnes, Crowe & Shaefer, 2007).

Nearly 90% of workplaces included at least one form of a wellness program (Aldana et al., 2005). Although the assumption is these programs will benefit employees in attendance (Altchiler & Motta, 1994), there is no data that truly supports this claim (Parks & Steelman, 2008). Additionally, some wellness programs were educationally-based and aimed at the determination of workplace risks (Sperry, 1984). Risks in the SBAE teaching profession look a bit different than the typical workplace risks (Rank & Retallick, 2017). For example, Rank and Retallick (2017) noted SBAE teachers often must contend with hazards in the form of livestock interactions. A combination of occupational hazards and overexertion through long work weeks open this profession to many different types of stressors (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). This can place SBAE teachers at a larger risk at developing job dissatisfaction through stress and fatigue (Thieman et al., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

A fitting theoretical framework to better understand holistic health of agricultural educators is the Montgomery et al. (2012) holistic model. This model is based on the psychological theory of Carl Jung (Mayes, 2005) and is comprised of four functions.

Montgomery presents the model as the quadrants related to body (physical), heart (social and emotional), spirit (creative), and mind (cognitive). The body quadrant is comprised experiencing the environment as it is perceived through the senses. The heart encompasses feelings with a focus on its social and emotional responses for participants. The spirit is the creativity quadrant that involves the intuition. This quadrant focuses on imagination and the aspects that lend themselves to creativity and innovation. The mind quadrant is representative of cognitive thinking and behavior as well as the skills that are developed as a result.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of the self-perceived wellness of school-based agricultural educators. To address this purpose, Q methodology is appropriate because of its ability to explore the subjective, self-referential viewpoints of participants.

Limitations

The following limitation to this study is acknowledged:

1. The findings cannot be generalized beyond the SBAE teachers who participated in the study.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may provide insight into the self-perceived well-being of agricultural educators.

Definition of Terms

1. Concourse- The concourse is a broad range of subjective opinions derived from a variety of sources that are neither supported or refuted scientifically (Brown et al., 1999).

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2. Q set- The Q set is the set of statements derived from the concourse that comprise the instrument (Brown et al., 1999).

3. P set- The P set is comprised of participants in the study (Brown et al., 1999).

4. Array- The set of numerical data indicating statement placement (Brown et al., 1999).

5. Factor- Factors are the statistically grouped sorts that comprise a viewpoint (Brown et al., 1999).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review incorporates previous research about wellness of educators and

retention of agricultural educators while providing a rational for the research. The purpose of this

study was to explore perspectives of self-perceived wellness of school-based agricultural

educators. Studies cited in this chapter are not all in an agricultural context but have implications

in the field of agricultural education. This chapter includes the history of SBAE, the elements of

well-being as defined by Gallup, Inc., the concept of social support, American adult fitness, and

the threats to well-being that derive from being an agricultural education instructor in the state of

Oklahoma.

The History of SBAE

SBAE programs serve more than a million students across the United States in grades 6

through 12 (NAAE, 2020). These programs are comprised of three components: (a) classroom

and laboratory instruction; (b) supervised agricultural experience (SAE); and (c) an agricultural

and leadership development organization (The National FFA Organization) (Heath et al., 2021).

The classroom and laboratory instruction component of these programs often include

facilities such as livestock facilities or farms, agricultural mechanics laboratories, and science

laboratories, to name a few (NAAE, 2020). These facilities aid in the instruction of agricultural,

food, and natural resources (AFNR) career clusters with the aim to prepare students for entry into

agriculturally-based jobs, enhance agricultural literacy, and develop entrepreneurship opportunities (Phipps et al., 2008). The use of these career clusters as a foundation provides opportunities for the implementation of science into SBAE programs (NAAE, 2020).

It was not until the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 that project-based learning made an appearance in SBAE curriculum (Rank & Retallick, 2017). This experiential learning approach would later be adapted into the Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) through the expansion provided by the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (Phipps et al., 2008). Experiential learning through students' SAEs allows for application of knowledge attained through classroom and laboratory instruction (Rank & Retallick, 2017). Although SAE projects help students acquire agricultural skills and knowledge (Ramsey, 2009), students also develop personal skills, such as problem solving, responsibility, and communication, that would be beneficial in the job field (Heath et al., 2021).

The National FFA Organization is a student organization that provides opportunities for student growth through competitive events, conferences, and leadership experiences (Heath et al., 2021). As extensions of the National FFA Organization, local chapter programs and activities serve as a means to enrich the instructional and SAE components of SBAE programs (NAAE, 2020). SBAE instructors function as the FFA advisor mentors and guides students throughout their experience in the National FFA Organization (Christian et al., 2013).

Roles of the SBAE Teacher

Mentor (Christian et al., 2013), experiential learning instructor (Phipps et al., 2008), and classroom and laboratory instructor (Rank & Retallick, 2017) are just a few ways SBAE programs are described. SBAE programs may have begun in the classroom (Rank & Retallick, 2017) but have expanded to encompass livestock facilities, laboratories, competitions, and travel (Phipps et al., 2008; Rank & Retallick, 2017), each of which a SBAE teacher must be equipped to

teach and thrive in (Torres et al., 2008). Only 32% of the time instructors spend in their job is

spent on classroom instruction (Torres et al., 2008).

Terry and Briers (2010) identified 20 roles that SBAE teachers find themselves filling

throughout their time in the profession. They are:

- Accountant

- Adult educator

- Agricultural literacy consultant

- Coach of students in competitive events

- Counselor

- Disciplinarian

- Event organizer

- Experiential learning specialist

- FFA chapter advisor

- Field instructor

- Laboratory instructor

- Leadership development expert

- Lifelong learner

- Motivator

- Program manager

- Professional

- Public relations agent

- Supervisor of experiential learning (SAE) activities

- "Traditional" classroom teacher

- Volunteer coordinator

- Well-balanced, total person.

Elements of Well-being

Rath and Harter (2010) developed five elements of well-being described in their book, *Well-being: The Five Essential Elements*. Through the interaction of these elements comes the definition of well-being as it is used in this study. Those elements are (a) career, (b) physical, (c) community, (d) financial, and (e) social wellness (Rath & Harter, 2010). A description of each element is provided below.

Career Wellness

According to Rath and Harter (2010), career wellness is perceived to be one of the most important measures of wellness. They defined career wellness as "what occupies one's time and the enjoyment found within their chosen field" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 6). Rath and Harter (2010) contended this area of wellness holds great importance because most people spend most of their waking hours engaged in their career. Clark et. al (2008) determined prolonged stretches of unemployment could have a longer lasting negative impact on one's life satisfaction than even the death of a spouse. A study conducted by Gallup (2008) further emphasized the importance of career wellness. It found people who are disengaged in their role in the workplace are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression over a year span. Although these odds seem disheartening, having a manager who focuses on employees' individual strengths reduces the rate of actively disengaged employees to just 1 in every 100 (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Social Wellness

Rath and Harter (2010) stated who one choses to surround themselves with directly influences that person's well-being. They defined social wellness as "the strong relationships and love in one's life" (p. 6). According to a study of social networks featured in *Well-being: The Five Essential Elements*, a person is 6% happier if a connection three times removed is happy

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(Fowler & Christakis, 2008, as cited in Rath & Harter, 2010). That same study determined an annual income increase of $10,000 is only associated with a 2% increase in happiness. Although this finding shows a weak correlation between money and happiness, a strong correlation is found in the influence of those closest to one on their personal decisions (Fowler & Christakis, 2008, as cited in Rath & Harter, 2010). If one's best friend has a healthy diet, one is five times more likely to have one as well (Rath & Harter, 2010). Gallup found that an hour of social time can quickly decrease the probability of a bad day (Gallup, 2008).

Financial Wellness

Financial well-being is not about the quantity of money that one has; rather, financial wellness is "measured through the effective management of one's economic life" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 6). Although money is not the root of happiness, it does have an impact to a certain point (Frank, 1999). Income matters until a person can cover all of his or her basic needs, namely food security (Rath & Harter, 2010). Financial well-being is more than available money, but how responsibly that money is handled (Frank, 1999). Research indicates individuals who are sad are more likely to spend four times as much on a product than those who are not; whereas those who invest in experiences see an increase in overall well-being (Frank, 1999).

Physical Wellness

According to Rath and Harter (2010), physical well-being is measured through a series of both net positive and net negative exchanges. They defined physical wellness as the "health and energy to complete daily tasks" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 6). Various aspects of health and even hereditary traits can be traced back to dietary choices (Turner et al., 2008). Epigenetic inheritance is the passing on and expression of genes due to experiences that may activate particular genes (Lacal & Ventura, 2018). Many signaling genes were reduced in a mere five weeks after dietary changes were made (Lacal & Ventura, 2018). One of the most impactful aspects of physical

wellness is sleep (Gaultney, 2010). Research indicates the optimum amount of sleep is seven to eight hours with proven consequences of productivity following anything in excess or less than that (Gaultney, 2010).

Community Wellness

Community well-being factors can be the difference between a good and great life (Rath & Harter, 2010). Rath defined community wellness as "the engagement of a person with the area they live in" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 6). The first and largest level of community well-being resides in the sense of security. From there, it falls into personal preference for aspects such as accommodations, diversity, and interests to name a few (Costanza et al., 2007). The second portion of community well-being is giving back (Rath & Harter, 2010). Research indicates individuals who are highly invested in their communities have more to offer those communities (Costanza et al., 2007).

<div align="center">

Social Support

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Social support is primarily received and/or given through three main avenues: informational support, instrumental support, and emotional support (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). Knobloch & Whittington (2002) recognized employment sources, such as administrators, community, and other educators as a form of social support. Cornu (2013) recognized personal sources, such as family and friends, as another source. Perceptions of social support, true or untrue to the reality of their availability, can impact an instructor's self-efficacy level (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is the cognitive process through which the perception of one's skills and abilities as they pertain to their chosen career field are created. He went on to say these perceptions are heavily influenced by self-reflection, coping mechanisms, an individual's effort and commitment level, as well as their resiliency levels (Bandura, 1977). Prior research indicates a strong correlation between perceived

social support availability, an instructor's self-efficacy, and their commitment level to their career (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014).

American Adult Fitness

Obesity is an ever-growing concern in the United States (Hedley, 2004). In a 2004 publication, Hedley found the prevalence of obesity to be on the rise in both adult and child populations. This study found no strong correlations between any ethnicity or gender and the presence of obesity (Hedley, 2004); however, a later study found a relationship between education and the prevalence of obesity a decade later (Cohen et al., 2013). Acknowledging this relationship, the societal limitations are nearly unaccounted for, focusing on white individuals with adjustments made for socioeconomic differences (Cohen et al., 2013). No true connections have been found to determine if an individual is predisposed based on their environment, heritage, or upbringing, merely that it is a problem that is only growing (Cohen et al., 2013; Hedley, 2004).

Threats to Well-being

Wellness is a broad subject that covers many facets of personal and professional lives (Rath & Harter, 2010). This expansive reach opens the position up to many threats to SBAE teachers' well-being. These threats are comprised of (a) mental health and stigmatization (Giacometti-Meyers, 2005; Troman & Woods, 2001), and (b) occupational impact in and out of the classroom (Smith & Smalley, 2018).

Mental Health Stigma

In 2001, approximately 25% of the world's population dealt with some type of mental illness, contributing 12% to the overall disease rate (Ahmedani, 2011). Ahmedani (2011) projected this overall disease rate to grow to a total of 15% by the year 2020. Public stigma is the

beliefs and assumptions that lead to the differential treatment, avoidance, and even fear of those with mental illnesses (Corrigan & Penn, 1999). Despite the large percentage of individuals affected, this stigma has led to the segregation and reduced personal perceptions of affected individuals, correlating with a higher chance of experiencing discrimination in employment fields and housing opportunities (Corrigan & Shapiro, 2010). In a study conducted among primary care providers, trends were discovered between stigmatization of mental health symptoms and a tendency to avoid referring the patient or continuing to fill prescriptions for physical ailments (Corrigan et al., 2014). The health care providers claimed that the psychological symptom indicate that the patient would not follow the proper usage nor the referral (Corrigan et al., 2014). Although the refusal to adhere to treatment plans is associated with mental illness, the refusal of treatment indicates a level of stigmatism even in the medical profession (Ahmedani, 2011).

Occupational Environment

To fulfill the three aspects of an ideal SBAE program, educators find themselves taking on significant levels of mental, physical, and emotion exertion (Smith & Smalley, 2018). Terry and Briers (2010) identified 20 roles SBAE instructors take on in the profession ranging from an instructor to a laborer and even an accountant. This wide range of expectations coupled with single teacher programs often leads to the overexertion of the instructor (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). This overexertion often manifests in the instructors far exceeding a 40-hour work week as they take on supervisory roles for SAEs, develop lessons for the classroom, and help with FFA activities regularly (Straquadine, 1990). Additionally, agricultural educators find themselves on the road nearly as often as they find themselves in the classroom (Torres et al., 2008). From conventions to stock shows and camps, these instructors often find themselves crossing state lines and putting hours behind the wheel (Torres et al., 2008).

Livestock Interactions

Injuries associated with livestock handling are among the most dangerous and costly accidents in the agricultural industry (Douphrate et al., 2009). A majority of Supervised Agricultural Experiences through agricultural education programs in Oklahoma, as well as nationally, involve livestock exhibition and care (Whiddon, 2015). Instructors are responsible for check-ins on the student's progress with their experience and aids in situations when needed, leading to a large number of livestock interactions in this career field (Whiddon, 2015). With such a high risk of injury, animal behavior specialist Temple Grandin outlined methods of reducing animal stress (Grandin, 1989).

Classroom-related

The first five years employed as an agricultural education instructor are often perceived to be the hardest due to many unforeseen physical and mental challenges (Caspersen & Raaen, 2013). Caspersen and Raaen (2013) found teachers in this career state often display symptoms of culture shock, the transition to a new place or after a major life event, and a lack of social connections as they establish themselves in a new community. This challenge works in contention with standards set by former teachers and the following comparisons, the expectations of the community and school system as well as relationships within the community to influence the longevity and wellness of educators in this field (Kitchel et al., 2012). These stressors as well as a perceived lack of social support leads to feelings of isolation (Burke et al., 2015) which can manifest as a greater risk for psychological disorders, such as depression, or even poor coping mechanisms, such as the abuse of alcohol (Cobb, 1976).

Summary

This chapter focused on the body of existing research on the health and well-being among educators in an agricultural context. It included literature related to the history of SBAE, roles of

SBAE teachers, elements of well-being, social support, American adult health, and threats to well-being.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the strategies and procedures used to collect and analyze data. It includes a researcher statement and description of the research design. Also included are descriptions of the P set, concourse, and Q set, as required when using Q methodology.

Research Design

Q methodology is the scientific analysis of opinions and beliefs (Brown et al., 1999). This methodology presents participants with a set of statements derived from opinions on that subject, which they are asked to rank according to their own opinions. These rankings are then factor analyzed, leading to the standard scores of statements within the factor to be interpreted. This study used six phases of Q methodology: developing a concourse, selecting a Q set and a P set, conducting the interviews and gathering the resulting sorts, analyzing the data, and interpreting the data (Brown et al., 1999).

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

I was able to draw upon my childhood and professional experiences to develop some of the naturalistic aspects of the concourse. I am a certified SBAE teacher, although I have not yet taught beyond a student teaching field experience, and I am the daughter of a SBAE teacher with 16 years of experience.

Participants

This study received Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board approval February 25, 2021. The P set is those individuals recruited to sort the Q set statements (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Q methodology explores participants rather than the items or statements within the Q set to find patterns in the data leading to the viewpoint and thought process of the person themselves (Brown, 1980). These patterns are then clustered together based on their correlation values to determine an underlying opinion expressed by that particular group (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Selection of the P set can be made through several methods, namely theoretical and random (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). This study used a theoretical method. The P set for this study was SBAE teachers who were actively teaching in the state of Oklahoma in 2020. Contact information for these instructors was obtained through personal contacts and the Oklahoma CareerTech website. According to the website, the total population consisted of 456 SBAE teachers in Oklahoma.

The original sample size of participants for this study was 76 SBAE instructors who were currently employed in Oklahoma high schools in 2020. These 76 were selected as they met parameters concerning geographical location, experience level, sex, certification path, and school size of the participants. As there are five categories and an even number of participants, the word approximately will be used to indicate general trends as the participants will not evenly fall into these categories. The state of Oklahoma is divided into five areas through the Oklahoma FFA Organization. Approximately 15 instructors were recruited per area. Of those 15, approximately seven were younger than 35 and approximately seven were older than 35. At least three female SBAE teachers were recruited per area. At least one alternatively certified SBAE teacher per area was recruited, as well. There are not many towns classified as urban in Oklahoma. Instead, urban

and suburban were classified as higher population density. Approximately three instructors per area were recruited from these more densely populated areas and approximately three from rural areas. While years of experience was taken into consideration, only one teacher with more than 20 years of experience and one with less than five were needed per area to gain a more diversified perspective. Recruitment emails were sent to all 76 teachers who fit the identified parameters.

Instrument Development

In Q methodology, the concourse is developed in order to result in the Q set, the instrument used with participants. Additionally, a demographic questionnaire was developed to better understand the characteristics of the participants. Herein these are detailed.

A concourse is derived from subjective opinions on a topic that neither has nor lacks scientific backing (Brown et al., 1999). Additionally, Brown et al. (1999) indicated that a concourse covers a wide array of viewpoints on a particular topic from scientific reasoning to mere gossip. The concourse's purpose is to reflect a broad variety of perspectives on a singular topic (Brown, 2004). A concourse can include various items from statements to pictures (Brown et al.,1999). The concourse for this study included opinionated statements regarding the well-being of Oklahoma SBAE teachers.

Statements can be derived by theoretical sources, naturalistic sources, or a hybrid of the two (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Theoretical sources are those based in literature (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Naturalistic sources are those that stem from naturally occurring encounters such as conversations or interviews (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Examples of theoretically sourced statements in this study include Statement 3, "I am uncomfortable administering medication to livestock because I'm scared I'll hurt myself or the animal" and Statement 39, "I am confident in my skills as a teacher and plan to remain in my profession for years to come." Examples of naturalistic statements include Statement 9, "I feel a tremendous pressure to stay in my position

as my favorite students finish high school" and Statement 40, "No one can possibly be an expert in everything it takes to be an ag teacher."

The concourse for this study was developed through a hybrid method. The statements for this study are based in literature, casual conversations with SBAE teachers and agricultural education professors at Oklahoma State University, and discussion in a Q methodology course through the same university. The utilization of these resources as well as my own experience provided a wide representation of viewpoints over the following identified aspects of well-being: Doing, Feeling, Social, Creating, and Motivation.

The full concourse was composed of a total of 62 statements. Following the principles of homogeneity and heterogeneity, the statements were categorized according to the Montgomery et al. (2012) model of holistic integration: Doing, Feeling, Social, Creating, and Motivation. Once categorized, the statements were then analyzed for redundancy and readability and to ensure they provided diversity within each category.

The concourse is sampled to create a final list of statements, known as a Q set. A Q set includes between 20 and 100 items related to a particular topic (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Structured samples are created through purposeful selection of statements from each section to ensure a systematic approach to covering all possible opinion areas (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Unstructured development samples at random from the identified sections (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). This could cause an uneven or inaccurate representation of viewpoints on the subject matter (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

For this study, 40 statements were structurally sampled from the concourse. This Q set comprised of approximately seven to 10 statements from each category. For example, statements categorized within the *Doing* aspect include Statement 2, "I am physically exhausted by the weekend commitments of this profession." Additionally, Statement 6, "I am worried this job is

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taking an irreversible toll on my immune system," falls into this category. Examples of statements within the *Feeling* category are Statement 9, "I feel a tremendous pressure to stay in my position as my favorite students finish high school" and Statement 14, "I am drowning in the demands of this career. It's way more than what I signed up for." The *Social* category contained statements such as Statement 21, "I avoid social centers in town after competitions we didn't win to minimize the risk of running into parents," and Statement 18, "My family and friends rarely visit me because there is nothing to do in my town." Statement 28, "I rarely lecture in my classroom and find innovation in teaching strategies," and Statement 24, "Not having to teach to a state exam allows me to create creative and engaging lessons," comprise the *Creating* category. The final category, *Motivation*, contains statements such as Statement 38, "This job gives me purpose," and Statement 25, "The pressure to find funding for new equipment and projects is intense."

After a final Q set was established, five agricultural educators sorted the statements to ensure the statements contained no typographical or grammatical errors and that the statements were clear. These sorts were not included in the data collected for this study, rather, they serve as a way to trial the format of the study and to make any additional changes to the statements before it was sent to the participants.

The condition of instruction is a question or statement participants are asked to consider as they sort the Q set (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). For this study, the condition of instruction was "Define yourself."

A record sheet was developed featuring a 40-square pyramid in which participants sorted the cards. The record sheets were developed to force a choice on participants' values associated with the statements. Participants physically placed the cards with the statements on them into the record sheet. The process allows for two statements to be placed in the most unlike me column,

two to be placed in the most like me column, while eventually increasing to a central column for those statements with which the sorter does not have strong feelings. The numerical values for these columns range from -5 to +5. These columns have squares for 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5, 4, 3, 3, and 2 statements per level respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Record Sheet

Record Sheet
Describe yourself.

| -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Most UNLIKE Me | | | | | | | | | | Most LIKE Me |

The demographic questionnaire was developed to aid with interpretation. Participants were asked to complete the optional questionnaire, which included questions related to town, school size, gender, and ethnicity. Additionally, they were asked to provide contact information for a potential follow-up interview.

Procedures

Each in-person participant received a manila envelope that included the participant information sheet, a typed list of the concourse with large type available upon request, a record sheet, 40 cards with individual Q set statements printed on them, and a demographics

questionnaire. Individuals who participated via Zoom received these materials via email. On completion of the sort, in-person participants placed their responses back into the envelope to avoid cross-contamination with other participant records or record sheets due to COVID-19 concerns.

After IRB approval (Appendix A), individuals were recruited by email communication containing a recruitment flyer inviting their participation in the study. When a positive response was received indicating a willing participant, a follow-up email containing the participant information sheet and steps for setting up a Zoom or in-person interview was sent. The individual then selected their preferred method and a 30-minute window that would be the most convenient for them.

Data collection began with participants receiving a participant information sheet, record sheet, the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B), and the list of statements in both a card format and in a traditional list format. Participants were asked to sort the statements according to the condition of instruction, "Describe yourself." Participants accomplished this ranking by physically placing the cards with the statements on them into the record sheet.

Participants began the sort by dividing the cards into an initial three piles: most like them, least like them, and indifferent. The participants were then guided through placing the cards on the record sheet. Participants were asked to choose two statements most like them and two most unlike them and place those statements in the outer most columns. They were then instructed to work back and forth from most like and most unlike until they reached the middle column. Using the cards allowed participants to move the statements as many times as needed to reach an accurate end product. Once the participant finalized their sort, participants were asked to complete the demographic questionnaire. Upon completion, those who participated over Zoom emailed a photo of their demographic survey and the final record sheet. These images were

accessed via a password protected computer and deleted from the researcher's email and

computer. Those who completed the sort in person placed their final sort and demographics

survey back into the manila envelope and returned the sealed envelope to the researcher.

Post-sort Interviews

At the conclusion of the demographic survey, participants were asked to include their

name, or a code name if they preferred, and a phone number for a potential optional post-sort

interview. This interview phase allowed for an expansion for both individuals whose sorts

strongly aligned with a factor. These individuals are known as exemplar sorters, or those sorters

who had high and pure sorts. A sort is considered pure when it has a high correlation with one

factor and low correlation with any other factors (Watts & Stenner, 2005). This also provides a

depth to the findings as participants could explain their background, experiences, or other factors

that could have affected how they sorted a particular statement or statements (Watts & Stenner,

2005).

Data Collection Adjustments Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

Q sorts are traditionally conducted in person in a one-on-one setting, facilitating an open

discussion between researcher and participant, allowing the researcher a greater opportunity for

field notes. For this study, university Covid-19 protocol restrictions made such data collection

difficult to conduct. Although this restriction made communication more difficult, the researcher

was able to be more purposeful in the selection of the P set, allowing access to those who may not

have participated due to distance.

Following the Covid-19 protocol of Oklahoma State University, social distancing was

maintained when possible and masks were made available to each in-person participant. I

maintained a mask at all times and provided hand sanitizer to each participant in the study. Each

participant received their own record sheet as well as sets of statement cards to reduce cross

contamination and the response sheets for each participant were stored in individual manila

envelopes. Data collection was also available via Zoom.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were collected through Q sorts, or the usage of Q methodology to

sort a series of statements (i.e., Q set) into a pyramidal record sheet according to the condition of

instruction, "Describe yourself." The data from these sorts were analyzed through PCQ software

(Stricklin & Almeida, 2004). PCQ software generated a correlation matrix from which the

relationship between sorts was determined. This correlation matrix was factor analyzed by

centroid followed by varimax rotation. Standard scores were calculated within these factors,

which were used for factor interpretation along with the most positive and negatively ranked

statements, distinguishing statements, demographic information, field notes, and post-sort

interviews. Initial results yielded two strong factors and one weak third factor. On further

consultation, we agreed the data set should maintain two factors to get an accurate analysis of the

two strong viewpoints.

Summary

This chapter summarized the research method chosen, the design, and the methods used

during the study. This chapter included the process behind the development of the concourse,

sampling procedures to determine a final Q set, and the selection of the P set. It also outlined the

process of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of self-perceived wellness of

SBAE teachers. To address this purpose, this chapter describes the statistical results of the factor

analysis derived from the Q sorts as well as interpretation of the resulting factors. The 24 sorts

were loaded into the PCQ Analysis Software for Q-Technique (Stricklin & Almeida, 2004),

which provides a statistical analysis of Q sort data including factor computation, variance and

relationships between factors, and provides arrays from standard scores of the statements for each

factor identified. This analysis was used in addition to post-sort interviews, demographic data,

and field notes to interpret the meaning of each viewpoint. This chapter includes the factor

loadings with defining sorts noted, consensus and distinguishing statements, and themes that

emerged from the interpretation to fully discuss the findings.

Factor Analysis

The calculation of a correlation matrix of each sort to all other sorts is the first step in

analyzing the Q sorts. This indicates a similarity of any sort with all others to provide an initial

glance of sorts that are similar and different. The correlation matrix is submitted to factor analysis

using a centroid procedure that showed a strong first factor and a potential second factor.

To determine which sorts would define the factor, a significance was calculated. This Q set was composed of 40 statements, indicating SE = $1\sqrt{40}$ or SE = 0.16. The standard error is identified as 2.58 (Brown, 1980). When multiplied against the SE = 0.16, the correlation coefficient for p < 0.01 would be 0.41. To determine defining sorts among the sorts that significantly load on the factor, a sort must be significant on only the one factor. Defining sorts were used to determine the final factor solution. A confounding factor loading is identified when a sort is significantly loaded on one or more factors. In this study, 17 of the participants loaded significantly on one factor and six were considered non-significant, meaning they did not reach the 0.41 significance level on either factor. One sort was considered confounded, meaning it met the 0.41 significance level on both factors.

The factors were rotated to discover the strongest viewpoints among the data. After judgmental rotation attempts, varimax showed two strong factors and a potential third factor. On further consultation with Q methodology advisors, it was agreed that the data set should maintain two factors to interpret the viewpoints. Using the significant and defining sorts that achieved the highest correlation to a single factor, exemplar sorts were determined (See Table 1). The participants with exemplar sorts were contacted for post-sort interviews, if that information was voluntarily provided on the sorters demographic questionnaire. To interpret the meaning of the factor, an array of statements using a standard score calculation was constructed for each factor to provide the foundation for understanding the array. Other information used was distinguishing statements (those that were more like one factor than the other), demographic data, and post-sort interviews.

Table 1

Factor Matrix for Loadings of Participants' Q Sorts

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2
1	0.48*	0.31

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2	0.64*	0.38
3	0.12	0.14
4	0.11	0.75*
5	-0.19	-0.06
6	0.35	0.62*
7	0.67*	0.27
8	0.56*	0.10
9	-0.01	0.44*
10	0.63*	0.24
11	0.27	0.43*
12	0.34	0.49*
13	0.51*	-0.13
14	0.43*	-0.26
15	0.18	-0.26
16	-0.12	-0.48*
17	0.71*	0.00
18	0.58*	0.31
19	0.10	0.04
20	0.13	0.35
21	0.59*	0.45*
22	0.02	0.60*
23	0.27	0.03
24	0.11	0.67*

Note: The * indicates a significant loading at 0.41 or higher. For 0.01 significance $1/\sqrt{40} \times 2.58 = 0.4100$.

Findings

Of the two factor arrays identified in this study, nine of the 24 participants aligned with the first array and eight participants aligned with the second array. The first array was named the Network Builders for their value of interpersonal relationships and feelings of support in their community and careers. The second array was named the Confident Connectors for the comfortable integration of their career, community, and family life.

Network Builders

Of the nine defining sorts included with this perspective, six sorters reported they were male and three reported they were female. In demographic questioning, these sorters reported that their years of experience as agricultural educators ranged from one year to 40 years. Additionally,

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five of the sorters reported they worked at a 6A sized school while the remaining four fell in the range of 1A to 4A.

Many of the "most like me" statements for this group reflected interpersonal relationships among instructors, students, and members of the community. While the "most unlike me" statements reflected concerns about discussing mental health or avoiding social situations following a competitive loss. Most like and most unlike statements for the Network Builders are found in Table 2.

Table 2

Network Builders Most Like and Unlike Statements

Number	Statement	Array Position
Most Like		
37	I love making a positive difference in students' lives.	5
38	This job gives me purpose.	5
13	Nothing feels better than creating aha moments for the student.	4
19	I have someone I can talk to when things get tough.	4
20	I have a ready-made network among other agricultural educators in my state.	4
Most Unlike		
1	I'm tired and stressed and don't recognize myself in the mirror.	-4
10	I fear the negative connotations that may result from discussing my mental health.	-4
11	My family has grown closer through the traveling this job provides.	-4
3	I am uncomfortable administering medication to livestock because I'm scared I'll hurt myself or the animal.	-5
21	I avoid social centers in town after competitions we didn't win to minimize the risk of running into parents.	-5

Empathetic

Empathy ties into connections for educators in this array (Statement 37, array position +5). Participant 7 stated in a post-sort interview, "I never know what my students face outside of my classroom, which is why I strive to be a positive force for them." Network Builders use empathy as a foundation on which to build connections to students as well as other educators. These connections take additional energy to create and often do not have an immediate impact on the instructor themselves (Statement 34, array position +2). Statement 37, "I love making a positive difference in students' lives," and Statement 38, "This job gives me purpose," were the most positively ranked statements for the Network Builders. When asked about developing relationships with students, Participant 17 stated in a post-sort interview, "It's all about balance. Relationships are essential to connection with your students, but it's very important to maintain professionalism." This participant continued by saying, "This year was a challenge in that aspect but those relationships I had made last year made my students more open with me through the transition to distance learning."

Socializer

Sorters in this perspective may not have felt impacts from this career on their social lives (Statement 23, array position 0). Participant 7 stated in a post-sort interview, "I stay busy but I've made friends in the ag [education] community so I still have that social aspect." Thus, the Network Builders use their career to help build up other aspects of their lives. However, they do not let their careers negatively affect their social movements. When they lose a contest or face other setbacks, they maintain their social lives without fear of parental discontentment (Statement 21, array position -5).

The most negatively ranked statements in this factor have to do with mental health and family. Statements 12, "I fear financial instability will delay many major life decisions," and 11,

"My family has grown closer through the traveling this job provides," were ranked in the -3 and -4 columns respectively. Participant 21 stated in a post-sort interview that, "These statements ranked low for me because my children are older and no longer at home, so they apply to me less than they would ten years ago." Conversely, Participant 14 mentioned in a post-sort interview, "I haven't settled down or started a family yet, so I wasn't sure where to put these statements because they don't apply."

Connected

Statements concerning the personal and professional networks of the participants were also ranked among those most like this group, while statements relating to avoiding parental judgement and negative physical and mental stress were ranked most unlike this group. Sorters included in this perspective never feel truly alone in their profession (Statement 20, array position +4). Participant 7 referred to developing connections among other agricultural educators and the sentiment is echoed by Participant 2, who stated in a post-sort interview, "Even when I feel completely overwhelmed, I know I could make a phone call to any other educator and they would give whatever they could" (Statement 20, array position +4). This ties into the +4 placement of Statement 19, "I have someone to talk to when things get tough."

The participants who participated in the post-sort interview were asked about the proximity of statements 39 (+3), "I am confident in my skills as a teacher and plan to remain in my profession for years to come," and 40 (+3), "No one can possibly be an expert in everything it takes to be an ag teacher." On initial review, these statements seem contradictory. Participant 13 responded in a post-sort interview, "I am confident in my skills but I don't think any single teacher can have skills in every area. There's always some way to grow and improve."

Confident Connectors

Eight defining sorts were included in this perspective, six of which reported that they were male and two that they were female. These sorters had a range of two to 22 years of teaching experience, as answered in the demographic questionnaire. Four of the eight sorters reported working for a 6A school while the remaining sorts ranged from a B to a 3A school.

The Confident Connectors group found their footing as agricultural educators personally and within their communities. Many of the "most like me" statements for this group reflect their involvement with production agriculture within the community, physical fitness and time outdoors. The "most unlike me" statements focused on negative effects of their profession on their physical and mental health as well as a decreased social life. Most like and most unlike statements for the Confident Connectors are found in Table 3.

Table 3

Confident Connectors Most Like and Most Unlike Statements

Number	Statement	Array Position
Most Like		
31	Being an Agricultural Education instructor comes as easily as breathing to me.	5
11	My family has grown closer through the traveling this job provides.	5
13	Nothing feels better than creating aha moments for the student.	4
4	My job requires a level of physical fitness above the average teacher.	4
22	I am comfortable with getting involved in production agriculture within my community.	4
Most Unlike		
14	I am drowning in the demands of this career. It's way more than what I signed up for.	-4
18	My family and friends rarely visit me because there is nothing to do in my town.	-4

6	I'm worried this job is taking an irreversible toll on my immune system.	-4
10	I fear the negative connotations that may result from discussing my mental health.	-5
3	I am uncomfortable administering medication to livestock because I'm scared I'll hurt myself or the animal.	-5

Creative

The participants in this section ranked statements regarding creativity and student connections highly positive, indicating that they highly value student interactions as well as remain passionate about their career and industry. The highest-ranking statement, "Being an Agricultural Education instructor comes as easily as breathing to me," showed the factor's passion and enjoyment of their career. The other high-ranking statements indicate that they have close family lives that are not adversely impacted by their jobs.

Sorters included in this perspective incorporate two outlooks on creativity with a positive leaning (Statement 27, array position +2; Statement 24, array position -1; Statement 13, array position +4). Participant 6 stated in a post-sort interview, "Creativity is subjective. I want to be creative with the delivery, not the content." Thus, the negative location of Statement 24 (array position -1), "Not having to teach to a state exam allows me to create creative and engaging lessons." Although Statements 27 and 32 are ranked positively by both factors, they are much higher than the third creativity Statement, number 28, which reads "I rarely lecture in my classroom and find innovation in teaching strategies." This statement ranks in the neutral category for this array. I asked participants whose creativity was essential to the program as well as their source of inspiration. Most respondents answered both with "My students." This indicates that while they value and encourage their students to be creative in the classroom, many of the instructors do not follow suit in every aspect of their teaching styles.

Bold

Creativity ties into boldness for educators in this array. Having a stable local network allows these teachers to branch out into other areas such as production agriculture (Statement 22, array position +4). Participant 24 stated in post-sort interview, "I've made connections that have given me opportunities to broaden my involvement. I want to stay learning and doing new things in this career" (Statement 22, array position +4). These instructors also recognize the physical aspect of their job (Statement 4, array position +4). They find unique ways to combine their creativity with the outdoors and physical activities (Statement 4, array position +4). Despite their heavy local involvement and physical lifestyles, these sorters maintain a strong social life, as well. Participants ranked Statements 23, "I have a limited social life due to the high demands of my career" and 18, "My family and friends rarely visit me because there is nothing to do in my town," as -3 and -4 respectively.

Idealistic

The sorters in this factor find value in their impact on people (Statement 13, array position +4). Participant 4 stated in post-sort interview, "Sometimes I let the positives outshine the hard parts to the point that I forget them at times." These instructors see the positives of their jobs reflected back in their family lives as well (Statement 11, array position +5). While these instructors feel they are naturals in their positions, it is important that they feel supported in the negative case scenarios as their idealism may leave them less prepared (Statement 31, array position +5).

Although the participants in this factor alluded to a high self-efficacy, the negative placement of Statement 39, "I am confident in my skills as a teacher and plan to remain in my profession for years to come,'" offers some confusion. Participant 22 stated in a post-sort interview, "This statement is a bit like a double-edged sword." This person elaborated by saying,

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"There are times when I both doubt my abilities and will to stay in this profession. I think the 'years to come' aspect is what led to my placement."

Distinguishing Statements

Distinguishing statements are those with a large difference in ranking values between factors (Brown et al., 1999). These statements allow the researcher to determine the main differences that separate factors and help shape the interpretation of the data. As this study only has two factors, there is only one set of distinguishing statements. A total of eight statements comprised this category and are represented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Distinguishing Statements

Card	Statement	Factor One Values	Factor Two Values
11	My family has grown closer through the traveling this job provides.	-4	5
17	The agricultural educator is a prominent position in my community.	-1	3
22	I am comfortable with getting involved in production agriculture within my community.	0	4
35	This job highlights the skillsets and knowledge I worked so hard to develop.	1	-3
37	I love making a positive difference in students' lives.	5	-1
38	This job gives me purpose.	5	0
39	I am confident in my skills as a teacher and plan to remain in my profession for years to come.	3	-2
40	No one can possibly be an expert in everything it takes to be an ag teacher.	3	-3

The statement with the largest difference has to do with social connections despite the social foundations found in each factor. The Confident Connectors have very strong local connections, which is further solidified by the +5 position of Statement 11. The Network Builders have a much larger reach yet may not see as strong familial connections through this position (Statement 11, array position -4).

The Confident Connectors indicate a stronger sense of belonging in their communities through their higher placements of Statements 17, 11, and 22. Despite this natural sense of belonging, a lack of a broader professional network has these instructors feeling unrecognized for their skill (Statement 35, array position -3) and doubting their longevity in the profession (Statement 39, array position -2).

The Network Builders are confident in their profession (Statement 38, array position +5). They have a strong professional network and derive a sense of confidence from it that not only drives them in the classroom (Statement 37, array position +5) but gives them security in their position (Statement 39, array position +3).

Consensus Statements

With only two factors, 14 statements comprised the consensus category, or statements that had common loadings by participants across both factors. These statements are within one column of each other and do not offer distinguishing values between the factors. Table 5 identifies these statements.

Table 5

Consensus Statements

Card	Statement	Factor One Values	Factor Two Values
2	I am physically exhausted by the weekend commitments of this profession.	-1	0
3	I am uncomfortable administering medication to livestock because I'm scared I'll hurt myself or the animal.	-5	-5
5	I often eat fast food or snacks as I don't have time to stop for full meals.	2	3
6	I'm worried this job is taking an irreversible toll on my immune system.	-3	-4
10	I fear the negative connotations that may result from discussing my mental health.	-4	-5
13	Nothing feels better than creating aha moments for the student.	4	4
15	The parents of my students add stress to my well-being on a daily basis.	0	0
16	My job is essential and gives me peace of mind in these unprecedented times.	1	2
25	The pressure to find funding for new equipment and projects is intense.	-2	-2
26	My community has a hard time accepting change.	-1	-2
27	Creativity is essential to the success of my students and program.	1	2
29	This job has allowed me to explore unique hobbies in agriculture.	0	-1
32	My inspiration rarely runs dry in this career.	0	1
36	For the amount of time spent on the job, I'm not paid enough.	1	1

Participants in both factors sorted Statement 3 as the least like them, indicating a comfort in administering medications to livestock, each assigning it a -5 value. Each participant who agreed to a post-sort interview mentioned having duties overseeing and interacting with at least one species of livestock. One individual said in a post-sort interview, "It's a duty that I've grown to understand and complete safely over years of practice," making a distinction that it was a learned skill rather than a role initially comfortable for her. A second participant from the other

viewpoint stated in a post-sort interview, that he "grew up around livestock and [had] been comfortable administering medication since [he] was a child."

Participants ranked Statements 13, 15, 25, and 36 the same in both factors. However, the most interesting rankings on this list have to do with the topics of health and creativity. Participants do not feel as though their health is at risk through this career, as indicated by the negative rankings on Statements 2 and 6, yet both factors rank Statement 5 on the positive side. One participant supported the theory by stating in a post-sort interview, "I'm young, I don't see eating poorly effecting my health for many years to come." Although not all participants share the youth of that interviewee, many did not consider eating poorly as having a direct impact on their immediate well-being. Statement 10 received highly negative rankings across both factors; yet, it is a topic that has gathered a lot of attention in today's society. When asked why it was ranked so negatively, one respondent stated in a post-sort interview that she "[doesn't] fear negative connotations from discussing mental health because I simply don't discuss it." However, another sorter noted she wanted an "open conversation about mental health" and ranked it low because she does not fear negative connotations being associated with these conversations.

Summary

The analysis and interpretation process outlined in this chapter included the development of a correlation matrix that was factor analyzed with standard score calculations of statements in each factor to provide an array. The arrays were interpreted using augmented information from a comparison of statements between factors, demographics, field notes, and post-sort interviews. A summary interpretation for the findings as the two factor arrays of the Network Builders and the Confident Connectors was discussed.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of the self-perceived wellness of school-based agricultural educators. This chapter summarizes the study and presents the conclusions about agricultural educators' viewpoints on their physical and mental well-being.

Summary of the Study

Q methodology allowed for an in-depth look into two perspectives held by SBAE teachers in Oklahoma toward well-being. Twenty-four Oklahoma SBAE teachers sorted a Q set of 40 statements related to wellness according to those most like or most unlike their opinions. Statements included in the Q set were developed via naturalistic and theoretical means. All sorts were entered into PCQ software for Q methodology, with the analysis resulting in two factors for interpretation. Arrays developed for each factor, post-sort interviews, demographic data, and field notes were used in the interpretation of the two factors: the Network Builders and the Confident Connectors.

The Network Builders have a substantial amount of support from their community and from colleagues in their profession. These sorters indicated a sense of connection to their community, establishing the themes of empathetic, socializer, and connected. The Confident Connectors are independent instructors who are deeply rooted in their own communities,

however, they are just beginning to build a broader network. This independence builds the foundation for the themes creative, bold, and idealistic. These sorters ranked statements concerning creativity and student engagement highly positive. While they remain confident in their teaching abilities, sorters in this category have a low perception of social support outside of their local community.

Conclusions

There are three conclusions derived from the findings of this study. SBAE teachers have different perspectives on the concept of social support, which leads them to perceive their abilities and competencies in relation to the level of support. The two perspectives that were explored in this study are those who have prioritized *local* connections and those who have prioritized *broad* networks. A second conclusion is that, due to the physical and mental strain of this profession, sorters in either perspective have similar views on the negative role of stress in Oklahoma SBAE programs. Finally, the third conclusion is that social support and stress management should be integrated into professional development programs.

Implications for Theory

The conclusions of this study stemmed from concepts of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), self-efficacy, and the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). Social support is considered to be employment sourced (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002) or personally sourced (Cornu, 2013). These sources were represented by statements pertaining to professional and community networks to determine the connection between an instructor's level of perceived social support and their self-efficacy.

Physical Well-being

SBAE teachers spend less than a third of the time dedicated to their jobs on classroom instruction (Torres et al., 2008). The remaining 68% is divided between travel, work with livestock, and professional development among other activities and duties (Rank & Retallick, 2017). Although this exposes instructors to occupational hazards, statements about the physical demand of the profession have a neutral array position.

Where these viewpoints agree is in the positive array position of Statement 5, "I often eat fast food or snacks as I don't have time to stop for full meals." Obesity is a growing issue in the United States (Hedley, 2004) and SBAE teachers are not exempt despite the physical demands of their career. Always being on the move sounds like it would be beneficial to a person's health but can be detrimental when other aspects of their lives are neglected as a result.

Mental Well-being

In the informal conversations with SBAE teachers, stress was a common ailment that many instructors seemed to face almost daily. Curry and O'Brien (2012) determined a positive correlation between stress and burnout in this occupation, making it a factor to consider to combat the low retention rate in the education field (Darling-Hammond & Stykes, 2003). One of the surprising findings is, though it is often discussed, participants ranked stress related statements in more neutral or negative columns.

The Network Builders rely on their connections when things get tough. As a result, they have a very neutral approach to the role of stress in their career. They acknowledge its impact but do not allow it to overshadow other aspects of their career. Although Confident Connectors did not rank statements relating to having someone to talk to as highly as the Network Builders, they are not overwhelmed by the demands of their job.

Connections

The common thread for these viewpoints lies in connections, or a feeling of belonging to a community or network. Network Builders are secure in the networks they have already created. These sorters are cognizant of different opportunities in their fields to get involved on a broad level, allowing them to develop an expansive professional network. While they value connections in their own programs as well, they do not hesitate to get involved in the school system or even agriculture on the production level.

Confident Connectors also value these connections, as indicated by their name. Confident Connectors, while not all new to the profession, are just beginning to build these connections. For these sorters, the initial focus has been on their career in their own SBAE program. They have to be careful not to have a tunnel vision approach to their profession and look to the school system and profession as a whole for additional support and guidance when needed. This may mean that their networks are community centric in the beginning and may not reach the broad scope of their peers in the latter viewpoint.

Creativity

Another major finding is the role creativity plays in these viewpoints. The local focus of the Confident Connectors allows them a greater focus on implementing creativity in their programs. The independence of these sorters is the driving force behind their identified themes: bold, idealistic, and creative. They take risks rather than the typical curriculum route and value having student input in their curriculum decisions. The Network Builders do not disvalue creativity, it is simply outranked by their drive to find a place among their peers.

Implications for Practice

Two strong viewpoints were determined through this study. While stress is not the most prevalent theme for either viewpoint, it is the thread that connects low teacher retention rates (Troman & Woods, 2001), physical health (Giacometti-Meyers, 2005), and their occupational environment (Smith & Smalley, 2018) to the self-efficacy and longevity of SBAE teachers. Cultivating positive and supportive relationships is an important aspect of well-being for both the Network Builders and the Confident Connectors. School administrators and those in leadership positions in agricultural education should be cognizant of the social needs of SBAE teachers and offer in-service education focused on social networking and other factors impacting career reliance. Due to the relationship between stress and teacher burnout (Curry & O'Brien, 2012), professional development programs on stress awareness, occupational safety, healthy living habits, life-balance, and fitness are needed.

Implications for Further Research

These findings are not directly connected to teacher stress or longevity in the field, further research could consider these areas. Additionally, further research could address the role of empathy and creativity in the agricultural education classroom. Future research should focus on the impact of COVID-19 and distance learning on Oklahoma SBAE programs. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and participants may have different opinions on the role of technology and social support from a distance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Exemption

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	02/25/2021
Application Number:	IRB-21-108
Proposal Title:	School-Based Agricultural Education Instructors' Self-Perceptions of their Wellness; A Q-Methodology Study
Principal Investigator:	Nicole Stevens
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Angel Riggs
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt
Exempt Category:	

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which <u>continuing review is not required.</u> As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

APPENDIX B: Demographics Survey

1. How old are you? _____ years

2. What is your gender? _____

3. Please check the item that best describes your ethnicity. Check all that apply.
   _____African American   _____Asian American

   _____Hispanic/Latino(a)   _____American Indian

   _____White   _____Other, please specify:
   _____

4. Are you from a rural, suburban, or urban city (check one)?
   ___ Rural (Less than 2500 people)

   ___ Suburban (More than 2500 and less than 50,000)

   ___ Urban (Greater than 50,000 people)

5. How many years have you taught Agricultural Education? _____

6. How many teachers are employed in your Agricultural Education Department? _____

7. What size school do you teach at (1A-6A)? _____

8. Were you alternatively certified? _____

9. Do you have any underlying health problems that affected your sort? If you feel comfortable, please explain.

10. What else would you like to say about the ideas on the statements you sorted?

A follow-up phone interview may be conducted to clarify results. If you would be willing to participate in a phone interview please write your first name (or a code name that you will know) and a telephone number at which you can be reached.

(CODE) NAME _____ PHONE _____

APPENDIX C: Factor Arrays

Number	Statement	Factor Arrays	
		1	2
1	I'm tired and stressed and don't recognize myself in the mirror.	-4	-1
2	I am physically exhausted by the weekend commitments of this profession.	-1	0
3	I am uncomfortable administering medication to livestock because I'm scared I'll hurt myself or the animal.	-5	-5
4	My job requires a level of physical fitness above the average teacher.	1	4
5	I often eat fast food or snacks as I don't have time to stop for full meals.	2	3
6	I'm worried this job is taking an irreversible toll on my immune system.	-3	-4
7	My job increases the time I spend outdoors tremendously.	0	3
8	My job keeps me on my toes and I easily accomplish my exercise goals while working.	-1	1
9	I feel a tremendous pressure to stay in my position as my favorite students finish high school.	-1	1
10	I fear the negative connotations that may result from discussing my mental health.	-4	-5
11	My family has grown closer through the traveling this job provides.	-4	-5
12	I fear financial instability will delay many major life decisions.	-3	0
13	Nothing feels better than creating aha moments for the student.	4	4
14	I am drowning in the demands of this career. It's way more than what I signed up for.	-2	-4
15	The parents of my students add stress to my wellbeing on a daily basis.	0	0
16	My job is essential and gives me peace of mind in these unprecedented times.	1	2
17	The agricultural educator is a prominent position in my community.	-1	3
18	My family and friends rarely visit me because there is nothing to do in my town.	-2	-4
19	I have someone I can talk to when things get tough.	4	2
20	I have a ready-made network among other agricultural educators in my state.	4	2
21	I avoid social centers in town after competitions we didn't win to minimize the risk of running into parents.	-5	-2
22	I am comfortable with getting involved in production agriculture within my community.	0	4
23	I have a limited social life due to the high demands of my career.	0	-3
24	Not having to teach to a state exam allows me to create creative and engaging lessons.	3	1
25	The pressure to find funding for new equipment and projects is intense.	-2	-2
26	My community has a hard time accepting change.	-1	-2
27	Creativity is essential to the success of my students and program.	1	2
28	I rarely lecture in my classroom and find innovation in teaching strategies.	-2	0
29	This job has allowed me to explore unique hobbies in agriculture.	0	-1
30	Being in nature connects me to a higher power.	-3	-1
31	Being an Agricultural Education instructor comes as easily as breathing to me.	2	5
32	My inspiration rarely runs dry in this career.	0	1
33	The twelve-month contract gives stability to my life that isn't found with other subjects.	2	0
34	The intrinsic awards are much higher than the extrinsic rewards in this career.	2	-1
35	This job highlights the skillsets and knowledge I worked so hard to develop.	1	-3
36	For the amount of time spent on the job, I'm not paid enough.	1	1
37	I love making a positive difference in students' lives.	5	-1
38	This job gives me purpose.	5	0
39	I am confident in my skills as a teacher and plan to remain in my profession for years to come.	3	-2
40	No one can possibly be an expert in everything it takes to be an ag teacher.	3	-3

VITA

Nicole Stevens

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: SCHOOL-BASED AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF WELL-BEING

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in your major at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2021.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2020.

Experience:

- High School Agricultural Education Instructor at Mustang Public Schools, 2021 – Present
- Graduation Research Assistant, 2020 – Present
- Logistic Management Specialist, 2019 – 2021
- Undergraduate Research Assistant, 2017 – 2020

Professional Memberships:

- Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership Graduate Student Association, 2020 – Present
- American Association for Agricultural Education, 2018 – Present
- National Association of Agricultural Education, 2011 – Present
- Oklahoma FFA Alumni Association, 2017- Present