

THE HABITS OF EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

CHARLES JOSHUA ROMAIN

(Under the Direction of Diana King)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine the most effective teaching characteristics and behaviors of recognized teachers throughout the state of Georgia. The researcher sought to discover the different habits of effective teachers and to discuss the topic with these educators in order to obtain their expertise on the subject. The researcher gathered literature investigating effective teachers and formulated a list of characteristics based on the research. Teachers recommended by the Georgia Agricultural Education State Staff were emailed a questionnaire based on the formulated list of characteristics and asked to participate in a focus group. The objective of this study was: determine the most effective teaching habits from nominated teachers in the state of Georgia. The major themes that arose after the literature review, questionnaire, and the focus group discussion include classroom control/discipline, care/personal relationship with their students, and variety/adaptable teaching styles.

KEY WORDS: Effective teacher; state staff; effective teaching characteristics

THE HABITS OF EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

CHARLES JOSHUA ROMAIN

B.L.A., University of Georgia, 2006

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

© 2013

Charles Joshua Romain

All Rights Reserved

THE HABITS OF EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

CHARLES JOSHUA ROMAIN

Major Professor:

Diana King

Committee:

Jason Peake

Frank Flanders

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May, 2013

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely wife, Jennifer. Her love and support encouraged me through graduate school and this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Diana King, without you I would have been lost trying to write a thesis. It was with your guidance and advice that I made it to completion. To the rest of my committee, Dr. Jason Peake and Dr. Frank Flanders, thank you for your suggestions and help. I appreciate that each of you made me feel comfortable with any questions or concerns that I might have had.

I want to thank the Georgia Board of Education agricultural state staff for working with me and nominating effective teachers. Also I want to thank the nominated teachers that participated in the study. Thank you for stating your beliefs in what makes an effective teacher.

Finally I want to thank my family for all of their love and support. I do not know what I would do without you. To my parent's thank you for always encouraging me. To my brother Zach and sister-in-law Courtney and my little nephew Parker thanks for supporting me. To my sister Carly and brother-in-law Jason and my three nephews Hunter, Paxton, and Cooper thanks for being so positive. To my wife's family, Mark, Debbie, and Stephen thank you for understanding when Jennifer and I could not come to visit because I had to work on my thesis. To my wife I cannot thank you enough, thank you for everything that you have done to support me and help me through this process. Your countless hours of proofreading are greatly appreciated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Definitions of Terms	1
Hypotheses	2
Limitations of Study	2
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Student Opinion	3
Teacher Opinion.....	6
Administrator Opinion	7
3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	10
Population and Sample Selection.....	10
Research Design.....	10
Data Collection	11
Data Analysis	12
4 FINDINGS/RESULTS	14
Table 1	16
Conclusion	21
Recommendations.....	23
REFERENCES	25
APPENDICES	

A INFORMATIONAL LETTER AND CONSENT	29
B EFFECTIVE TEACHING QUESTIONNAIRE	30
C FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM.....	32
D FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	33

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Frequency of Characteristics Exhibited by Effective Teachers.....	16

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's society where the education system is facilitated by standardized tests and student performance scores, more is expected of teachers to help students succeed (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). One way to help students succeed is to have effective teachers in the classroom. In order to have effective teachers in the classroom, effective teachers must be identified and observed. Once these effective teachers have been identified, the habits of these effective teachers must be evaluated so that additional teachers in the field and future teachers can study and utilize these techniques in their own classrooms. In 1971 Rosenshine and Furst brought attention to behaviors and characteristics of effective teachers with research that looked at multiple studies and performed a meta-analysis. Since that study many researchers have examined the topic, these studies are broken into three areas: (a) studies that acquire the opinion and view of students on effective teaching, (b) teachers opinion and view of what makes an effective teacher, and (c) research that obtains the administrator opinion and view of what makes an effective teacher.

Definitions of Terms

Effective Teaching – “the strategies, techniques, and approaches that teachers use to achieve the desired result – facilitating student learning” (Johnson-Leslie, Natalie 2007).

Characteristics – “a teacher's special personal qualities that the respondents felt had enabled the teacher to achieve success” (Walker, Robert J. 2008).

Behavior – the actions or involvement that a teacher performs in the classroom.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: The first hypothesis is that effective teachers will describe effective teaching practices that coincide with those identified in previous literature.

H₀₂: The second hypothesis is that the subject being taught does not increase the possibility to be an effective teacher.

Limitations of Study

One of the main limitations of the study is the sample size. Generalizability is limited, but that sample size is acceptable for the method of using a focus group. This study will only evaluate teachers from the state of Georgia. Another limitation of the study is that it only evaluated agricultural education teachers. Lastly this study will not evaluate the preparation or training of agricultural education teachers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been performed that investigated the various characteristics and behaviors of effective teachers. Amid a study performed in (1971), Rosenshine and Furst gathered all of the research to date on the characteristics of effective teachers. This was implemented in order to identify the behaviors that actually are the most effective and produce student achievement. In their study Rosenshine and Furst created a list of eleven characteristics of effective teachers that would enable the student to produce achievement in learning. The eleven characteristics that they perceived to be most important are: clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented and/or business-like behaviors, student opportunity to learn criterion material, use of student ideas and general indirectness, criticism, use of structuring comments, types of questions, probing, and level of difficulty of instruction. This study by Rosenshine and Furst is considered the pinnacle of research on characteristics and behaviors of effective teachers. It is often used today as the foundation for new research on this topic.

Student Opinion

Learning from students and gaining their insight into what makes an effective teacher is an appropriate way to start the review. Since students are the ones being taught and experiencing the learning from teachers, this is a great way to understand what makes an effective teacher and best helps a student to succeed. A study entitled “Effective vs. Ineffective Teachers Educating our Children” conducted by Johnson-Leslie (2007) reviewed student responses to characteristics of effective teachers and ineffective teachers. According to Johnson-Leslie, the students found various characteristics to describe an effective teacher. First, they observed that these teachers held an analytical/systematic approach, which means that the teacher is knowledgeable and

grades fairly. Also, effective teachers demonstrated instructor/group interaction, which refers to the teacher being approachable and a good communicator. Lastly, the students within this study felt effective teaching was displayed through organization/clarity, dynamism/enthusiasm, and having an instructor/individual student interaction. In (1986), John F. Check of the University of Wisconsin performed a study in which a 25 item questionnaire was given to college, high school, and middle school students. This questionnaire provided both objective and subjective answers. “This study was designed to identify unique traits that distinguish teachers who are effective from those who are incompetent” (Check, p.237). Check comprised a list of seven traits ranked in order of perceived importance. The top three characteristics were understanding of students and their problems, knowledgeable in subject matter, and the ability to relate to students. In addition to Check’s research, a study entitled “Twelve Characteristics of an Effective Teacher” by Walker (2008) was performed using college students. In this research, Walker (2008) employed preservice teachers in the process of obtaining a bachelor’s degree in teaching as well as inservice educators returning for an advanced degree. The students were asked to describe the characteristics of the teacher who inspired them to become a teacher. Being fair, holding high expectations, having compassion, and respect for students are a few of the personal and professional qualities found that Walker acknowledged as characteristics of an effective teacher.

Belanger and Longden (2009) used a web-based questionnaire given to students which looked at three dimensions of effective teaching. These included personality, classroom environment, and teaching style characteristics. This questionnaire revealed a number of characteristics and behaviors which included caring, approachable, and enthusiastic.

Khandelwal (2009) “sought to identify teaching behaviors that differentiate excellent and very poor performance of undergraduate college teachers” (Khandelwal, p. 299). She found that time

spent with students outside of class, fairness, and control were among the characteristics of effective teaching behaviors. More specifically, a study entitled “Factoring Contributing to the Effectiveness of Agricultural Education Teachers: What Students Say” by Luft and Thompson (1995) identified the characteristics of an effective agricultural education teacher. They found that most agricultural education teachers were committed to helping students learn, showed enthusiasm, and were a good role model for the students. Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James (2002) identified seven characteristics according to preservice teachers which included being student centered, having effective classroom control and behavior managed, and were enthusiastic about teaching.

Harlin, Roberts, Dooley, and Murphrey (2007) conducted a study that looked at agricultural science teachers more specifically. “The purpose of this study was to determine the competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required of effective agricultural science teachers both inside and outside the classroom as perceived by preservice and inservice teachers” (Harlin, Roberts, Dooley, Murphrey, p. 86). They reported that teachers need to be able to work with diverse groups, be able to resolve conflict, be able to facilitate skills that are being taught, be responsible, have internal motivation, be creative, be enthusiastic, and be able to motivate. The findings of Aschenbrener, Terry, and Torres (2010) reported that the student’s ideas of effective teaching behaviors are: enthusiasm, task oriented, opportunity to learn, clarity, and variability. This research article tried to explain effective teaching habits of university professors in a college of agriculture. They were able to identify those characteristics listed by studying undergraduate students and the instructors. Havita, Barak, and Simhi (2001) in their research entitled “Exemplary University Teachers: Knowledge and Beliefs Regarding Effective Teaching Dimensions and Strategies” asked students to rate their teachers’ effective teaching behaviors.

Lesson organization and clarity, effective use of class time, and a pleasant classroom environment were among the list.

Teacher Opinion

The teacher is one element of learning that can improve student achievement and success. Various studies have been conducted that analyzed the characteristics of an effective teacher based on the opinions of the teacher. In Scott's (1992) article "Evaluation of Effective Teaching," he explained that students were unique in the ways they learn. "Teachers have the responsibility to reach all students, no matter what the student's learning style" (Scott, p.14). He identified a list of elements that contribute to effective teaching which included preparing the students to learn, clarity in teaching, holding students attention, and enthusiasm. Brand (2009) studied music teachers and discovered the effective qualities they possess include but are not limited to teaching skills, personality, responsiveness, enthusiasm during teaching, students know what is expected of them, master of communication, care for students, and are an inspiration for their students.

Harlin, Roberts, Dooley, and Murphrey (2007) found the skills that teachers feel are important to be an effective agricultural science teacher include classroom management skills, strategies, and mentoring skills. Nonverbal communication, self-efficacy, and servant leadership were three characteristics found of music teachers when studied by Steele (2010). In Polk's "Traits of Effective Teachers" (2006), communication skills, creativity, and professionalism were a few characteristics of effective teachers obtained. In these three studies, whether it is an agricultural science teacher or a music teacher, communication and classroom management are important characteristics to master in order to be an effective teacher.

Roberts, Dooley, Harlin, and Murphrey (2006) used a mixed-methods approach to obtain the characteristics of an effective agricultural science teacher. They were able to collect data from agricultural science focus groups to identify these traits which include classroom management and mentoring skills. In a study entitled “Teaching Effectively: Award Winning Faculty Share their Views,” Maxwell, Vincent, and Ball (2011) obtained the opinion of award winning college teachers of what makes an effective teacher. Nine members of the faculty were selected to be in this study after being nominated by their academic dean. “While all acknowledged the importance of course content, they noted that if the focus is not on the student, content is of little consequence” (Maxwell, Vincent, and Ball, p. 162). Walls, Nardi, von Minden, and Hoffman (2002) divided their work into five behavior categories: emotional environment, teacher skill, teacher motivation, student participation, and rules and grades. They found that “caring about students was particularly prevalent in the descriptions of effective teachers” (Walls, Nardi, von Minden, and Hoffman, p. 45).

Organizational skills and monitoring of student progress were identified as effective teacher characteristics and strategies from eighteen high school teachers in a master’s degree program in a study performed by Fabry (2010). Havita, Barak, and Simhi (2001) interviewed teachers and they came to an agreement on four characteristics of effective teachers which included lesson organization, lesson clarity, making a lesson interesting/engaging, and classroom climate.

Administrator Opinion

The administrator view of the behaviors and characteristics of effective teachers is important since they are the ones who perform the evaluating and hiring of teachers. In an article from the Agricultural Education Magazine, Larsen (1992) gave some insight into a principal’s

view of what constitutes the characteristics of an effective agriculture teacher. These qualities include knowledge of subject matter, up-to-date with technology, use a variety of teaching methods, use real life examples, have classroom control, and motivate the students.

“Administrators rated manage classroom control as the most important skill needed by agricultural science teachers in the category of instructional management” (Larsen, p. 97).

Taylor and Williams (2003) identified the skills that school administrators feel are important to be an effective agricultural science teacher as a good communicator, manage the classroom environment and recognize different learning styles. They also found that effective teachers could collaborate with other teachers and develop lesson plans. Roberts and Dyer (2004) wanted to develop a consensus list of behaviors that make an effective agriculture teacher. They identified that effective agriculture teachers have the following characteristics: effectively motivates students, passionate for subject matter, effectively manages student behavior and maintains discipline in the class, uses a variety of teaching techniques.

Instead of performing another study on what students, teachers, and administrators believe are characteristics and traits of effective teachers, the researcher wanted to select effective teachers based on the criteria that was presented from previous studies. The current study does not seek to gain the belief of individuals on what makes an effective teacher. The current study seeks to evaluate effective teachers and understand the habits they possess that make them effective teachers. After determining what constitutes an effective teacher, this study sought to select effective teachers with the help of the Georgia State Department of Education state staff. In the state of Georgia, we have another group of individuals who play an important role. The Georgia State Department of Education state staff are available in the state of Georgia and have not been utilized in past research. In Georgia, the Georgia State Department of

Education state staff are the experts. They study and observe agricultural education teachers and their programs at least once a year, thus bringing another level of knowledge on effective teaching to the current study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to identify the practices and habits of effective agricultural education teachers in the state of Georgia. With this knowledge, teachers, both present and future, will be able to implement the findings of these traits and characteristics so that students can achieve greater success.

Population and Sample Selection

This statewide study focused on eleven agricultural education teachers in the state of Georgia. The population for this study focused on the 280 high school agricultural education teachers that represent 180 different schools across the state of Georgia (Georgia Ag. Ed. Annual Report). The researcher wanted to find out the habits of effective agricultural education teachers. This study will be a census study of all 280 agricultural education teachers in the state of Georgia. By collecting data from these agricultural education teachers, the researcher was able to understand the habits of these effective teachers. These behaviors are not just for one subject but habits that can be implemented by any teacher.

Research Design

To accomplish the purpose of this study, a mixed methods approach was used. First, a comprehensive list of traits and characteristics that make up an effective teacher were identified from the literature. Once a list of traits and characteristics were formed, the researcher evaluated and studied the list to form a more condensed list which consisted of the most effective traits and characteristics. From this list, a questionnaire was developed that consisted of fifteen questions each representing the characteristics and traits that were found most frequently during research. Each question had an answer of never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always represented on a

Likert-type scale of one to five, with one representing never and five representing always. On the questionnaire the participants were asked to give their judgment on the importance of these specific characteristics and traits and how important they play in the role of being an effective teacher. The participants were able to select a characteristic or trait as never being important to always being important.

The state staff was chosen because they have not been studied in past research. In the state of Georgia, the state staff are the experts at teacher evaluations. They study and observe these teachers yearly. Every school that has an agricultural education program in the state will be observed at least once every year. The purpose of the Georgia State Department of Education agricultural state staff is “providing professional and technical development for the agricultural education program to ensure student learning, FFA leadership and career development opportunities” (Georgia Ag. Ed. Annual Report, p.7). The state staff observed all 280 agricultural education teachers in the state of Georgia using the comprised list of traits and characteristics of effective teachers in order to determine who the effective teachers were. The state staff were asked to recommend three to four of the most effective teachers from each region, with the intent of inviting up to twelve teachers.

Data Collection

The teachers that were identified most as effective teachers were sent an invitation to join the researcher at the Annual Winter Meeting of the state agriculture teachers’ professional association for a focus group. Along with the invitation a questionnaire was also sent to these effective teachers, to gain their thoughts and ideas of what makes an effective teacher. The reason for this was to gain their own ideas without being altered or hindered by other teachers in

the group or the researcher's ideas. Also by having the questionnaire in advance, this will give the effective teachers time to think about what they do that makes them an effective teacher.

At the Annual Mid-Winter Conference in January the researcher conducted a focus group with the effective teachers that were selected through observation. To increase the flow of the focus group the researcher developed an outline which would guide the interviews to keep the focus group on task. The outline consisted of a welcome and overview of the focus group topic, guiding questions to keep the flow and subject topic on task, some ground rules and a list of questions which were developed in advance.

Data Analysis

In order to address the research topic the most appropriate technique was determined to be a focus group utilizing the qualitative method. To ensure a productive focus group the moderator followed proper focus group techniques as outlined by Leedy and Ormrod (2005). Steps taken include formulating questions in advance, finding a suitable location, and recording responses verbatim. Questions for the focus group were formulated from the responses that were received from the questionnaire in order to further validate the findings.

Of the eleven teachers that were selected and invited to the focus group, nine participants responded and attended the focus group for an 82% participation rate. The focus group lasted fifty five minutes and consisted of nine questions and a period of time for the participants to talk about anything that involved effective teaching that was not covered in the previous questions. The moderator recorded the focus group session and later transcribed the meeting precisely as it was discussed. After transcribing all the data, the researcher was able to determine the recurring themes from the focus group. The moderator highlighted emerging themes that were discussed in the focus group and the frequency of each was calculated. The researcher showed validity by

comparing the focus group themes to the Likert-type questionnaire used for this study. Data was collected using Likert-type scales and treated as ordinal data. These were reported as means and standard deviation. Nominal data was reported as the frequency of the themes from the focus group and the education level of the participants that was collected.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS/RESULTS

Eleven teachers were selected by the state staff as effective teachers. Of those eleven teachers, nine participated in the study giving an 82% participation rate. Demographic information was collected to get a better understanding of the teachers that were selected. The first three demographic questions are to gain personal information. There were six males and three females that were selected as effective teachers, giving us a 67% male participation rate and 33% female participation rate. The average age of the participants in the study ranged from 29 to 50. The average number of children that each participant has is 1 and the range was zero to two. The next three demographic questions that were asked involve educational/teaching information. The educational level of the teachers involved in the focus group was of interest to the researcher in order to understand how many years of education these effective teachers might have. Five of the participants have obtained a master's degree. Three of the participants have acquired a specialist degree. One of the nine participants has achieved their doctorate degree. Years of teaching experience was also evaluated to cognize if experienced or new teachers might be effective. The average years of teaching experience for those that participated in the study was 18.44. The range of experience for those selected was six to 25 years of experience, giving reason to believe that effective teaching can be achieved by new teachers. During the focus group, one of the participants talked about a teacher's energy and enthusiasm level compared to experience and knowledge level. The participant stated, "I think the longer you teach you get more experience and more knowledge; also your energy and enthusiasm start to drop. So when those two cross, your energy and enthusiasm versus your experience and knowledge, that is going to be your most effective years." Thus, somewhere in the middle of your teaching career

is going to be your most effective years of teaching. The demographic results that were attained from the questionnaire coincide with that statement. Additional demographic information that was obtained was to find out if these effective teachers were high school or middle school teachers. Of the nine teachers 78% were high school teachers with the other 22% teaching at both high school and middle school.

Question number nine regarding classroom control received the highest scores with a total of 44 out of a possible 45 with an average score of 4.89 and a standard deviation of 0.33. Enthusiastic and motivation tied for the second highest score which were questions number one and ten. They each had a total score of 43 and an average of 4.78 with a standard deviation of 0.44. Next, three questions were tied with a total score of 42. They were questions number three, four, and fifteen, which focused on the characteristics and traits, good communicator, fair, and student centered, respectively. These questions had an average score of 4.67 with a standard deviation of 0.50. Even though all fifteen characteristics and traits were selected because of the repetition that they were found to be used in research findings, this proved that certain characteristics and traits hold more weight when related to effective teaching, especially these six being the highest scores. Eight of the characteristics on the questionnaire; enthusiastic, good communicator, fair, relates well with students, prepared, classroom control, motivation, and student centered all have an average score that equates to always. The remaining questions on the questionnaire were also found favorable with the participants. Those seven characteristics were: knowledge of subject, organization, good sense of humor, uses variety in teaching, utilized technology, clarity, and responsive all achieved an average score that associates them to often on the questionnaire. The table below illustrates the importance of these teacher characteristics and

their relationship to effective teaching. Table 1 includes a list of all characteristics along with their means and standard deviations.

Table 1. *Frequency of Characteristics Exhibited by Effective Teachers*

CHARACTERISTIC	M*	SD
Classroom Control	4.89	0.33
Motivation	4.78	0.44
Enthusiastic	4.78	0.44
Good Communicator	4.67	0.50
Student Centered	4.67	0.50
Fair	4.67	0.50
Relates Well With Students	4.56	0.53
Prepared	4.56	0.53
Knowledge of Subject	4.44	0.53
Clarity	4.44	0.53
Good Sense of Humor	4.33	0.71
Uses Variety in Teaching	4.22	0.67
Responsive	4.22	0.44
Organization	4.00	0.87
Utilizes Technology	3.67	0.87

*Based on a 1-5 Likert-type scale: 1= Never, 5= Always

During the focus group nine major themes were postulated. Those themes in the order of the quantity of times that they were brought up are: care/personal relationship, variety/adaptable teaching styles, discipline/classroom control, motivation/passion for subject, time management, teaching experience, relevancy of subject, learn from mistakes, and set high standards.

Care/personal relationship with your students tied with variety/adaptable teaching styles; both of these themes were brought up fourteen times throughout the focus group to tie for number one.

The third most talked about theme during the focus group was discipline/classroom control.

The first major theme that arose from the focus group was caring for your students and building a personal relationship with them. Most participants believed that being personable and caring for your students correlates to being an effective teacher. This means getting to know them on a personal level, not just knowing them as a student in one of your classes. This also relates to the student/teacher relationship, allowing the students to get to know who you are

outside of the classroom, who your family is, where you go to church, and what are your hobbies and interests. Participant number one indicated that to be an effective teacher, the teacher must be personable. The participant stated, “be approachable and a mentor figure and not someone that they feel timid about coming to talk to about stuff.” Participant two mentioned that he cares about his students so much that he looks at their grades in all of their subjects. When he notices that a student is struggling with another subject he encourages them to improve their grades in that particular subject. This participant believes that students show more response to his encouragement than to the teacher of the subject they are struggling with. Participant three echoed this belief when she stated, “effective teachers have a personal relationship with their students, and they know where they are coming from and what they need in the classroom.”

The other theme that was mentioned the most throughout the focus group discussion was bringing a variety of teaching styles to the classroom and being able to adapt your teaching style to the students. This theme was another that transpired throughout the entire focus group discussion. One of the things that kept being repeated was to be an effective teacher you must have a variety of ways to present the same objective. You must be able to change the angles of what you are teaching to the students so that every learning style can be met. Participant seven mentioned, “I try to change it up so they are moving and doing something different about every 20 to 25 minutes so they are not just doing one thing over and over.”

Several of the participants stated that effective teachers are able to read their students and adjust their teaching. They mentioned they can read their body language and know when they are excited and interested in a particular lesson so they might spend a little more time on that topic since the kids are so into it. On the other side of that scenario, effective teachers are able to interpret when their students are bored and disengaged with the lesson that is being presented.

To go along with this theme, participant nine stated, “you can read your students body language. You can see it. You just got to know that you have got to do something different at that time. They are not getting anything at a certain point.” Therefore, effective teachers are able to adjust their teaching on the fly to meet the needs of their students.

Discipline and classroom control was the third most frequently discussed theme. This theme was conveyed eleven times during the focus group. This was a topic that the participants felt strongly about given the frequency and intensity that the theme was mentioned. Participant five specified, “to be an effective teacher you have got to have an effective discipline plan.” In order to accomplish this you must establish rules. Being consistent with your discipline and classroom control was a reoccurring theme for this topic. Also being fair was something that was mentioned with discipline and classroom control.

According to participant responses, discipline is about setting the tone and staying with it. Discipline is something you can always lighten up on, but it is almost impossible to become more strict. The first couple of years you have got to be hard and set the tone as far as discipline and classroom control, after that the word gets out amongst the students of what is expected in your classroom. To go along with this topic, many of the participants believed that discipline and classroom control issues would take care of themselves if the teacher teaches and keeps the students engaged. Participant three mentioned that when he interviewed for his first job, the superintendent had two important things that he wanted to know, “he wanted to know if I would discipline the students and what I was going to do to keep from having to.” Therefore, in order to be an effective teacher you must set the tone from the beginning on discipline and in turn this will allow you to have classroom control.

Once the teacher has obtained classroom control and discipline, now they can focus on the subject matter and how they are presenting the information to the students. This leads into a couple of themes that came from the focus group that deal with how you teach the material and why it is important. Motivation/passion for the subject was another theme that was repeated throughout the focus group. Participant six stated, “the students will tend to be more passionate about things that you (the teacher) are more passionate about.” Participants indicated that teacher motivation plays a major role in how effective a teacher can be. Attitude in the classroom changes as attitude in the teacher changes. Therefore, the participants will change how much time they spend on something when they see how excited their students are. Participant eight mentioned, “if we (the teacher) did not show energy and passion for agriculture the students probably would not have got involved or even known that they were excited about it.” Consequently, it is important for teachers in order to be effective to be motivated and passionate about the subject they are teaching.

Students today also want to know why they are learning something. Relevancy of subject was another theme that came from the focus group. According to participant responses an effective teacher is one that can show the students why I am teaching what it is that I am teaching. The teacher needs to be able to make things relevant and help the students understand how they can use this information later on in their life. Participant three stated, “an effective teacher is able to show the relationship of what we are learning to how you are going to use this regardless of the career path that you are going to choose.” Therefore, if you make that connection with the students it will be easier to get them engaged and interested in what you are doing.

Effective teaching is not just about teaching styles, subject matter, and how to present it. Additional themes were brought up during the focus group that tie into each other, they are teaching experience and time management. Most participants believe that with experience you are going to learn many ideas. You should be a more effective teacher as you age as long as you are willing to learn and admit to yourself mistakes that you have made and figure out ways to do things better. Participant two stated, “the thing that has probably made me an effective is my experience. Just that experience every year, going through and seeing what works and what does not.” Along with experience, time management is something that is needed to be an effective teacher. Many of the participants agreed that time management is something that you must get under control. It was mentioned in various ways such as staying after school for lesson planning, practices, and competitions. Participant three in particular adamantly stated, “Don’t neglect your family! Don’t forget that at the end of the day you still have to go home to your family, so don’t lose your family for your job.” Other participants responded by saying that if you are in multiple teacher departments take advantage of that and work together to split the load and cut the amount of time that is needed to work on certain things. Work with each other so you can help each other out.

The last two themes that arose throughout the focus group were allowing students to learn from their mistakes and setting high standards for your students. Participants indicated that they let them make mistakes. That sometimes they feel like the students learn more when they make mistakes and then have to go back and correct it. Participant seven stated, “I think if you look around this room you will see that a lot of us offer opportunities to the kids and that to me creates success, whether it is opportunity to fail or succeed.” By allowing them to learn from their mistakes and correcting it you are encouraging them to raise their standards. The last theme that

occurred during the focus group was setting high standards for the students. Many of the teachers talked about not allowing their students to quit and getting them to realize quitting is not an option. Participant five indicated that, “the key is getting them past the mindset of well, passing is good enough, then helping them to realize that they can do better and get them to strive to succeed.” It was also mentioned during the focus group that the teacher needs to try and get the students to take ownership in what they are doing. These are ways for the students to develop higher standards for themselves. Therefore, if a teacher can accomplish these themes from the focus group they will be better prepared to become an effective teacher.

Conclusion

With all that is required and expected of teachers it is wise for any teacher in the profession to do whatever is possible to become an effective teacher. End of course testing for students is something the school board and state are interested in (NCLB, 2002). Therefore, becoming the most effective teacher possible to ensure your students achieve their maximum abilities is beneficial for any teacher. Throughout the research on effective teaching, there is a wide array of ideas for what constitutes an effective teacher. Through the years students change and so does their way of learning. Having variety and adaptability in teaching styles is important to the success of students and was one of the major themes found within this study; which coincides with Check (1986) who found that “almost 60 percent of the students in this survey (all levels) wanted teachers to move around in the class” (Check, p. 327). Some students reported that the use of visual aids were effective while others reported that lectures and discussion is more effective. The researcher of the current study gathered as much information as possible on characteristics and traits of effective teachers from the literature and selected the ones that were revealed most often. The intent was to understand all of these techniques that have worked

throughout the years and discover exactly what are effective teaching habits for today's students. From the literature a list of fifteen characteristics that were most frequently revealed by students, teachers, and administration were compiled into a questionnaire. The results from the questionnaire showed that classroom control was thought of highly in order to be an effective teacher. This coincided with the qualitative data that was gained from the focus group of nominated effective teachers. Classroom control/discipline was one of the top three themes that were repeated throughout the focus group, which agrees with the findings of Luft and Thompson (1995) who found that agriculture education teachers should "set up a discipline plan so students will know in advance the consequences of their actions" (Luft and Thompson, p. 22). Larson (1992) also provided a view from the administrator's perspective and found "an effective agriculture teacher has a class where the students are absorbed in what is going on in the room and curious about the outcome. The teacher is both a catalyst that keeps things happening and a monitor that prevents individual student behavior from distracting the group" (Larson, p. 12). From the questionnaire student centered was one of the top characteristics and traits that the participants selected. This corresponded with one of the top themes from the focus group care/personal relationship, which agrees with Luft and Thompson (1995) who found that allowing students their opinions on subject matter and becoming close personal friends with some students were some examples of having a relationship with the students. Preservice and inservice teachers were evaluated by Harlin, Roberts, Dooley, and Murphrey (2007) and both felt that being caring/understanding is important for effective teaching. Other themes mentioned in the focus group include being fair, time management, and setting high standards/expectations for the students. Participant three mentioned it is important, "don't forget at the end of the day, you have to go home to your family," which plays into the time management skills that were an

important attribute also found by Harlin, Roberts, Dooley, and Murphrey (2007). Other participants mentioned that although you have to be disciplined it is also important to be fair to the students, which coincides with the findings of Walker (2008) who explained that “the most effective teachers handle students and grading fairly” (Walker, p. 65). Having high standards expected of the students is also crucial to being an effective teacher. Focus group participant two felt that “getting them past the mindset of well, passing is good enough” is important. They don’t need the mindset that “this is good enough to get by but that is not what we are here for.”

One particular study from Roberts and Dyer (2004) entitled “Characteristics of Effective Agriculture Teachers” is a great resource that correlates with the current research. The purpose of this study was to obtain a list of characteristics of an effective agriculture teacher. This statewide study selected a panel of experts to participate. They received a round of questionnaires using a Likert-type scale. The same characteristics of effective teachers were found as in the current study. These traits include caring for students, showing enthusiasm, maintaining discipline in the classroom, and using a variety of teaching techniques. For these reasons, teachers today should strive to achieve classroom control/discipline, care/personal relationship with their students, and variety/adaptable teaching styles to become the most effective teacher that they can be in order to reach the learning style of students today.

Recommendations

After this study it is recommended that universities offer a workshop to provide pre-service teachers a way to improve their teaching behaviors. According to the current study it would be important to make sure that these pre-service teachers have a firm understanding of classroom control/discipline, care/personal relationship with their students, and variety/adaptable

teaching styles in order to become an effective teacher. Teachers should strive to learn from other teachers that are experienced and have been teaching for a long time. In the focus group participants mentioned the importance of collaborating with other teachers to gain ideas and knowledge for teaching. Not only does this study review literature from students, teachers, and administrators but also sought to gain insight from nominated effective teachers. Therefore, the current study should be utilized by current and future teachers to understand the behaviors and habits of effective teachers.

Future research should focus on how to inform teachers on how to build a caring/personal relationship with students. Also student learning styles are constantly changing thus, understanding the various teaching styles and techniques that coincide could be an area of future focus. Future studies could also include teachers from various subjects and not just agriculture teachers. Additional research could look at the educational level of effective teachers to determine if differences in effectiveness exist related to the degrees held by the teachers.

REFERENCES

- Aschenbrener, M. S., Terry, R., & Torres, R. M. (2010). Creative and effective teaching behaviors of university instructors as perceived by students. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 51*(3), 64-75.
- Belanger, C. H., & Longden, B. (2009). The effective teacher's characteristics as perceived by students. *Tertiary Education and Management, 15*(4), 323-340.
- Brand, M. (2009). Music teacher effectiveness: Selected historical and contemporary research approaches. *Australian Journal of Music Education, 1*(1), 13-18.
- Check, J. F. (1986). *Education, 106*(3), 326.
- Fabry, D. L. (2010). Combining research-based effective teacher characteristics with effective instructional strategies to influence pedagogy. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching, 3*(1), 24-32.
- Georgia Agricultural Education 2010 Annual Report.
- Harlin, J. F., Roberts, T. G., Dooley, K. E., & Murphrey, T. P. (2007). Knowledge, skills, and abilities for agricultural science teachers: A focus group approach. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 48*(1), 86-96.
- Hativa, N., Barak, R., & Simhi, E. (2001). Exemplary university teachers: Knowledge and beliefs regarding effective teaching dimensions and strategies. *Journal of Higher Education, 72*(6), 699-729.

- Johnson-Leslie, N. (2007). Effective vs. ineffective teachers educating our children. *International Journal of Learning, 13*(9), 133-142.
- Khandelwal, K. A. (2009). Effective teaching behaviors in the college classroom: A critical incident technique from students' perspective. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 21*(3), 299-309.
- Larsen, C. (1992). Teaching effectiveness: a principal's view. *Agricultural Education Magazine, 65*(3), 12-13.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research, planning and design. (8th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson College Div.
- Luft, V. D., & Thompson, G. W. (1995). Factoring contributing to the effectiveness of agricultural education teachers: What students say. *Agricultural Education Magazine (Henry, Ill.) Agricultural Education Magazine, 68*(3), 23-24.
- Maxwell, L. D., Vincent, S. K., & Ball, A. L. (2011). Teaching effectively: Award winning faculty share their views. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 52*(4), 162-174.
doi:10.5032/jae.2011.04162
- Minor, Lynn C. Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. Witcher, Ann E. James, Terry L. (2002). Preservice teachers' educational beliefs and their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. *Journal of Educational Research, 96*(2), 116.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002).

- Polk, J. A. (2006). Traits of effective teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 107(4), 23-29.
- Roberts, T. G., Dooley, K. E., Harlin, J. F., & Murphrey, T. P. (2006). Competencies and traits of successful agricultural science teachers. *Journal of Career & Technical Education*, 22(2), 6-17.
- Roberts, T. G., & Dyer, J. E. (2004). Characteristic of effective agriculture teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 45(4), 82-95.
- Rosenshine, B. & Furst, N. (1971). Research on teacher performance criteria. In B.O. Smith (Ed.), *Research in Teacher Education – A Symposium* (pp. 37-72). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Scott, F. (1992). Evaluation of effective teaching. *Agricultural Education Magazine*, 65(3), 14-15.
- Steele, N. A. (2010). Three characteristics of effective teachers. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 28(2), 71-78.
- Taylor, A. L., & Williams, R. L. (2003). Skills for agricultural science teachers: School administrator's perspectives. *Texas Journal of Agriculture & Natural Resources*, 16, 93-101.
- Walker, R. J. (2008). Twelve characteristics of an effective teacher: A longitudinal, qualitative, quasi-research study of in-service and pre-service teachers' opinions. *Educational Horizons*, 87(1), 61-68.

Walls, R. T., Nardi, A. H., von Minden, A. M., & Hoffman, N. (2002), The characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 29(1), 39-48.

Appendix A

Informational Letter

August 20, 2012

Dear Agriculture Education State Staff Member:

I am C. Joshua Romain, a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Diana King in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled The Habits of Effective Agriculture Education Teachers that is being conducted this fall. The purpose of this study is to document the habits of effective agriculture teachers for the benefit of current and future teachers and agriculture students in the state of Georgia.

Your participation will involve reviewing the attached list of teaching characteristics and recommending agriculture teachers in the state of Georgia who display said characteristics for inclusion in a focus group and should only take about an hour of your time. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. No identifying information will be collected and once recommendations have been received all correspondence will be permanently deleted. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide information on habits effective teachers commonly use in their classrooms. These habits can then be shared with new and current teachers interested in improving their teaching effectiveness which may lead to greater student success. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me C. Joshua Romain at (706) 224-3340 or send an e-mail to cjromain@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this questionnaire in the envelope provided, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

C. Joshua Romain

Appendix B

Effective Teaching Knowledge

Thank you in advance for your time and input. Please complete the brief questionnaire below that will provide considerable information and valuable feedback. If you fill out the questionnaire online all you need to do is just highlight your answer. Thank you!

Please highlight your response to how important you believe each characteristic plays into being an effective teacher.

Characteristic	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable of Subject	1	2	3	4	5
Good Communicator	1	2	3	4	5
Fair	1	2	3	4	5
Organization	1	2	3	4	5

Please highlight your response to how important you believe each characteristic plays into being an effective teacher.

Characteristic	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Relates Well With Students	1	2	3	4	5
Good Sense of Humor	1	2	3	4	5
Prepared	1	2	3	4	5
Classroom Control	1	2	3	4	5
Motivation	1	2	3	4	5

Please highlight your response to how important you believe each characteristic plays into being an effective teacher.

Characteristics	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Uses Variety in Teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Utilizes Technology	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity	1	2	3	4	5
Responsive	1	2	3	4	5
Student Centered	1	2	3	4	5

1. What year were you born?
2. Are you: Male Female
3. How many children do you have?
4. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
5. How long have you been teaching?
6. What grade level do you teach? High School Middle School

Please feel free to add any further comments that you might have about what makes an effective teacher.

Thank you very much for your time!

I appreciate your completion of this questionnaire!

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "The Habits of Effective Agricultural Education Teachers " conducted by C. Joshua Romain from the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication at the University of Georgia (706-224-3340) under the direction of Dr. Diana King, Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication, University of Georgia (229-386-6533). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to evaluate and identify the practices and habits of effective agricultural education teachers in the state of Georgia. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Complete a questionnaire about my teaching habits and their effectiveness which will take about 15 minutes.
- 2) Participate in a Focus Group discussion about effective teaching habits which will last about 60 minutes and will be tape recorded.

There are no direct benefits for me. The researcher hopes this information will be used to better train future teachers and encourage current teachers to utilize effective teaching methods.

No risk is expected during participation in this research study.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will be assigned an identifying number and this number will be used on all of the questionnaires I fill out.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Name of Researcher
Telephone: _____

Signature
Email: _____

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. In your opinion what makes an effective teacher?
2. What habits do you possess that make you an effective teacher?
3. What do you do as a teacher to make sure that your students succeed?
4. What do you do in the classroom to make sure that your students stay involved and engaged?
5. Do you feel that teacher motivation plays a part in how effective a teacher is?
6. Do you feel teacher experience plays a role in being an effective teacher?

7. Does the teacher's education level determine how effective they can be in the classroom?