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Successful Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs as Defined by American FFA Degree Star Finalists

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Abstract

Within school-based agricultural education, supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs remain an integral component of the total program. However, researchers have reported that SAE programs lack focus and direction. Furthermore, SAE programs lack a current definition of successful SAE programs. This study was conducted utilizing qualitative research methods to examine American FFA Degree Star Finalists definition of successful SAE programs. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method and found seven components of successful SAE programs. Those components were: goal planning/ learning/career planning, utilization of program partners, income from SAE program, personal satisfaction, FFA participation, awards, and degree structure, hard work/personal growth, and complete records. The researchers concluded that learners should plan personal SAE goals, involve program partners in their SAE programs, be involved in the National FFA Organization, obtain monetary benefits, and complete accurate records. Therefore, practicing agriculture teachers should examine their current SAE instructional practices to ensure that SAE programs be based on the learners interest and provide support for a learner's personal, academic, and career goals.

Keywords: Supervised Agricultural Experience Programs, SAE, Agricultural Education, Development, Implementation

The development and implementation of the home-project by Rufus Stimson created a lasting impact on school-based agricultural education (SBAE) (Moore, 1988; Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). Stimson (1919) stated, "neither skill nor business ability can be learned from books alone, nor merely from observation of the work and management of others, both require active participation, during the learning period, in productive farming operations of real economic or commercial importance" (p. 32). Later, specific wording requiring the use of the home-project method was incorporated into the 1917 Smith Hughes Act, which stated that agricultural education programs shall provide "directed or supervised practice in agriculture, either on a farm provided for by the school or other farm, for at least six months per year" (as cited in Phipps et al., 2008, p. 443).

As legislation regarding vocational and agricultural education progressed, the Vocational Education Act of 1963 stated,

> any amounts allotted (or appointed) under such titles, Acts, or Acts for agriculture may be used for vocational education in any occupation involving knowledge and skills in agricultural subjects, whether or not such occupation involves work of the farm or of the

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> farm home; and such education may be provided without directed or supervised practice on a farm (Roberts, 1965, p. 580).

While the wording included in the 1963 legislation still mentioned supervised experiences, the 1968 amendment to the Vocational Education Act removed all wording of supervised experience education from federal legislation.

Stimson (1915) described the home-project as an application method of classroom instructional content in a real-world context. Currently, in agricultural education, the same description is utilized for the home-project referred to as Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs (Phipps et al., 2008; Retallick, 2010; Roberts & Harlin, 2007). However, participation in SAE programs has decreased over the last 30 years (Barrick, Hughes, Baker, 1991; Dyer & Osborne, 1995; Kotrlik, Parton, & Leile, 1986; Leising & Zilbert, 1985; Miller, 1980; Newcomb et al., 2004; Phipps et al., 2008; Retallick, 2010; Retallick & Martin, 2008; Roberts & Harlin, 2007; Steele, 1997; Wilson & Moore, 2007). Steel (1997) speculated that the lack of federal legislative requirement to utilize SAE programs could have caused the continual decrease in learner participation. In order to increase learner participation in SAE programs, the literature has indicated that SAE concepts must be expanded to meet the changing demographics and the lack of resources of agriculture learners (Barrick et al., 1991; Rayfield & Croom, 2010; Retallick, 2010; Retallick & Martin, 2008; Roberts & Harlin, 2007; Wilson & Moore, 2007).

Retallick and Martin (2008) found that as enrollment in agricultural education courses increased the number of learners that participated in SAE decreased. Furthermore, Dyer and Osborne (1995) found that a lack of resources, learner motivation, teacher supervision, and facilities were causes for decreased learner participation in SAE. Later, Retallick (2010) reported that the following five factors influence learner participation in SAE programs: "(a) changing learner demographics and societal attitudes, (b) mechanics and structure of schools, (c) resource availability, (d) image, and (e) agricultural education system" (p. 66).

While participation has decreased, studies were conducted that examined the influence of learner participation in SAE programs on learner academic performance on state standardized and agricultural content assessments and career aspiration. Arrington and Cheek (1990) found that a positive relationship existed between SAE scope and learner achievement in agribusiness and natural resource education. Furthermore, Ricketts, Duncan, and Peake (2006) found that a low-positive relationship existed between learner participation in SAE and learner's score on the Georgia state science standardized exam. Additionally, SAE has been found to influence learner intent and attitude towards teaching agriculture (Lawver & Torres, 2012). The authors purported that learners enrolled in a total SBAE program were more likely to major in agricultural education.

In addition to SAE's impact on learner performance and career aspirations, Lewis, Rayfield, and Moore (2012) examined Iowa, Missouri, Indiana, and Florida high school learners' knowledge of SAE concepts. The researchers reported that agriscience learners in Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa were more knowledgeable of SAE program types than learners in Florida. Approximately one-third of agriscience learners in Missouri, Indiana, and Utah could classify each type of SAE correctly, while over one-third of Florida agriscience learners could not classify any of the SAE types. The researchers reported that learners who participated in the study were not knowledgeable of SAE concepts.

Benefits of SAE participation have been examined throughout the literature base. Knobloch (1999, p. 16) stated that:

> Supervised agricultural experiences implemented in agricultural education programs by its true definition of learners experiencing agriculture with adult supervision have proved to help learners apply knowledge, clarify career choices, solve problems through decision-making, develop responsibility, and learn agricultural skills through practical experience.

Williams (1979) purported that learner participation in SAE assisted in the development of learner knowledge, skill, occupation attitudes, and educational attitudes. Later, Pals (1988) reported that learners perceived the following items as benefits of SAE participation: "(a) promote acceptance

of responsibility, (b) develop interest in agriculture, (c) learn to keep records, (d) make vo-ag class practical, and (e) develop a good relationship with instructor" (p. 39). Further, Bird, Martin, & Simonsen (2013) reported that historically SAE was initially motivated through the utilization of extrinsic factors. The researchers purported that intrinsic motivators should be utilized to motivate learner participation in SAE, following a learner's first year of participation. The researchers poised that the two most common intrinsic factors utilized to motive were learner-owned programs and learner interest in the SAE topic area. Further, researchers have reported that the National FFA Awards and Degree programs serve as extrinsic motivators for learner participation in SAE (Bird et al., 2013; Dyer and Williams, 1997; Leising & Zilbert, 1985; Retallick 2010; Wilson & Moore, 2007).

Currently, a gap exists in the agricultural education literature base regarding quality factors of SAE programs (Dyer & Osborne, 1995). Dyer and Osborne (1995) conjectured that research regarding "SAE programs lack definition, focus, and direction" (p. 10). Furthermore, Dyer and Osborne proposed several systematic research recommendations for the agricultural education profession to establish a future vision for SAE program utilization. The researchers purported that extensive research has been conducted that examined perceptions of benefits and limitations of SAE utilization and learner participation in SAE programs. More recently, agricultural education researchers reported that many learners lack knowledge regarding the types of SAE and causes for decreased learner participation (Lewis et al., 2012). Agricultural education researchers should examine of a more foundational question: What constitutes success in current day SAE program? A gap exists in the literature base regarding a definition of success within SAE programs (Barrick et al., 2011). Furthermore, even with a historical past and several textbooks descriptions of SAE program development, implementation, and utilization a gap exists between conceptually and theoretically defined SAE programs and current SAE practice in the SBAE classroom (Retallick, 2010; Wilson & Moore, 2007). In order to establish a vision for SAE programs, this investigation is needed to establish baseline data regarding a current definition of successful SAE programs and the current practice that is being implemented in SBAE classrooms. This study aimed to examine components of successful SAE programs as described by American FFA Degree Star Finalists. American FFA Degree Star Finalists were deemed as having conducted successful SAE programs based upon the selection criteria, qualifications, and application process that each finalist endures to be selected as a star finalist (National FFA Organization, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frames exist when the term success is defined or conceptualized within a given phenomenon. Schunk (2012) described success in behaviorism as a learned connection between a stimulus and a desired response. However, success can change and should be defined based upon the given environment in which the response is going to occur. Furthermore, each learned behavior is predicated by a specific stimulus. Examination of constructivist theories suggests success is defined as the establishment of new schema between new and previous knowledge. Constructivists believe that the connection between prior and new learning experiences can occur outside of environmental constraints (Hamilton & Ghatala, 1994). Therefore, these connections promote a learner's ability to transfer their newly learned knowledge and skill to additional contexts (Schunk, 2012)

According to Hamilton and Ghatala (1994), social learning is experienced when behaviorism and constructivist learning theories are combined through personal and social factors. When specifically examining social learning in a learner development aspect, Schroeder and Jackson (1987) referred to this theoretical frame as interactionism. The authors purported that interactionism is developed when the effects of an individual's interaction with the environment, environmental characteristics, and individual attributes influence a specific learner behavior. Moreover, interactionism builds upon Vygotsky's (1967) socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky

purposed that learner learning is enhanced through social interactions in the learning environment. Furthermore, agriculture learners engage in social interaction in their agricultural education classes. More specifically, learners socially engage with their peers, teacher, and other program partners during the SAE development and implementation process (Phipps et al., 2008). This study aimed to utilize the theoretical frame of interactionism to conceptually define the term successful SAE programs within SBAE.

Purpose and Objectives

A gap in the literature exists in regards to a definition of successful SAE programs. The American FFA Degree Star Finalists' have conducted SAE programs that some would deem their experience in SAE as being of high quality. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further develop a conceptual definition of a successful SAE program. This study addressed the need to further examine meaningful and engaged learning in SAE programs as a dimension of Priority Area 4 of the National Research Agenda (Doerfert, 2011). The objective that guided the study was to describe American FFA Degree Star Finalists' definition of a successful SAE program.

Methods

This study utilized qualitative methodology. Creswell (1998, p. 15) described qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem." Further, McMillian and Schumacher (2013) stated that qualitative research should utilize face-to-face data collection from participants.

A realism ontological perspective was utilized to guide this study. Realism stated that every person has an independent reality where truth exists (Mark, Henry, & Julnes, 2000). Therefore, realism suggests that research must examine an individual's reality through the observation or description of the interaction between the participant and the world. Further, Guba and Lincoln (1990) postulated that the natural physical world is different from an individual's perceived reality of the world. Therefore, this study utilized a constructionism epistemological perspective and a constructivism theoretical perspective. Constructionists posit that an individual constructs their knowledge through interactions between the individual and their perceived reality of the world (Crotty, 2010). Crotty (2010, p. 9) further stated, "it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon." Furthermore, constructivism refers to an individual's process of knowledge construction through interaction with a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Subjectivity Statement

The researchers in this study received formal preparation in agricultural education at both an undergraduate and graduate level. The primary researcher was a doctoral candidate in agricultural education, while the second researcher was an assistant professor of agricultural education. Both researchers utilized SAE programs when instructing agricultural education courses at the secondary level. The researchers were both trained in conducting focus groups and had successfully conducted pervious focus groups. Furthermore, the researchers philosophically and theoretically believe that SAE programs are an integral component to the total SBAE program.

Participants/Data Collection

The 2012 American FFA Degree Star Finalists (N = 16) were the participants of this study. This population was selected due to their involvement in their SAE program. The researchers noted that based on the selection criteria to be an American FFA Degree Star Finalist that the population had conducted SAE programs that could be deemed successful. Therefore, the researchers sought to further understand the participant's conceptual definition of a successful SAE program. The participants were sent a letter from the researchers inviting them to participate in this study regarding their SAE programs. Each finalist was selected through an application process by a panel of agricultural education professionals with expertise in agricultural education and SAE programs. Therefore, the participants were operationally deemed as learners who conducted quality SAE programs.

The focus groups were held following the National FFA American Degree Star Interviews and participants were informed that their participation in the focus groups was not required and would not affect the selection process. Focus groups were deemed appropriate for data collection due to the constructivist nature of the study (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). Two separate focus groups were conducted at the same time with eight and seven participants. Prior to the focus groups, the researchers constructed a semi-structured interview guide to moderate the focus groups. One researcher was with each focus group and served as the moderator. During the focus groups, the participants were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their definition of successful SAE programs. Each focus group lasted between 65 and 75 minutes (Patton, 2002). Participants were provided the opportunity to utilize pseudonyms during the data collection process. During transcription every participant was assigned a pseudonym even if the participant utilized a pseudonym during the data collection process (Creswell, 2013; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Data Analysis

The transcribed focus groups were analyzed using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) conceptualization of Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method. Lincoln and Guba (1985) present the constant comparative method as a four-step analysis methodology. The four steps consist of: (1) creating categories that are present in the data, (2) redefining and combining the established categories or creating subcategories, (3) integrating categories as they become more defined, and (4) constructing the written findings. The transcripts were first read for familiarity with the data before analysis began. Following, the transcripts were reviewed and preliminary categories were established for each transcript. The codes were then compared between transcripts, where they were redefined and combined. The transcripts were reviewed a final time to further define each category before the findings were constructed.

During the study, the researchers upheld trustworthiness and rigor (Dooley, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985) stated that qualitative research must ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. The researchers utilized member checking, peer debriefing, and persistent observations to ensure credibility of the findings. During the data analysis process, one of the researchers analyzed the data and met with other researcher and an external researcher to conduct peer-debriefing sessions to ensure the credibility of the data analysis process. When addressing transferability the researchers provided thick descriptions of the context. Finally, a methodological journal was utilized to address the dependability and confirmability of the study (Dooley, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher utilized a methodological journal to note each decision that was made during the analysis and collection processes. The methodological journal was utilized to thoroughly describe the methodological and procedural decisions made by the researcher throughout the study.

Limitations

The researchers noted that the participants in this study were not average agricultural education learners. Therefore, readers of this study should carefully examine the findings and conclusions to determine if they can be transferred to their situation and context.

Findings

The study participants were comprised of 11 males and four females (n = 15), one American FFA Degree Star Finalist opted to not participate in the study. Each of the participants graduated from high school between 2009 and 2011. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 21. Thirteen of the participants were enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Furthermore, three participants declared their post-secondary major as agricultural education. Finally, thirteen of the participants did not hold an FFA office above the chapter level, while two of the participants did not hold an FFA office at any level. From the analysis process, seven components of successful SAE programs emerged from the data. The seven components were: goal planning/learner learning/career planning, utilization of program partners, income from SAE program, personal satisfaction, FFA participation, awards, and degree structure, hard work/personal growth, and complete records.

Goal Planning, Learner Learning, and Career Planning

Several of the participants stated that they believed a component of a successful SAE program is goal planning. The participants noted that goal planning must begin during the SAE development and implementation process. Further, the participants stated that the learner's SAE goals must be attainable and relevant to the learner's interest and abilities. Bethany stated,

> I think that you know when you think about smart goals that are attainable is the number one thing because if you get too in over your head you're not going to be smart I mean you're not going to be happy you're not going to be enjoying yourself you're not even going to be making money if your way to over your head.

Furthermore, the participants stated that learning and cognitive development were essential components of successful SAE programs. The participants indicated that SAE programs provided them with experiences that strengthened their career choices and personal goals. Brian stated, "the main thing is that you learn something; you can take something away from it. And it better prepares you for the future." Further, Jeremy said, "without the ag classes (instruction, SAE, and FFA) that I have taken I wouldn't have known all that and beginning to be able to want to make this into my career and to go furthermore into it as a life-long career." The participants stated that the learning experiences gained from participating in SAE programs promoted learner responsibility. Therefore, these experiences promoted the success of a learner's SAE program. Jeremy stated,

> I started off in a company where I knew very little and very few people. I started off sweeping floors and just doing basic work. And I've worked my way up from doing that to actually being the field service person to look after team growers. It's my responsibility if they grow a quality [animal] or not and just me being able to take on all that responsibility that's what my SAE definition of success is.

Utilization of Program Partners

Regardless of the type of SAE that a learner conducts, the learner should involve parents, community members, employers, teachers, and/or peers in the development and implementation of their SAE program. The participants noted that the incorporation of various program partners is essential to the success of an SAE program. Program partners provided learners with a support group that provided guidance and suggestions to the learner throughout the development, implementation, and sustainment of their SAE program. Furthermore, the participants stated that, above all other program partner groups, family members should be involved in the development, implementation, and sustainment of an SAE program. Ryan stated,

> I feel like my SAE it's a family business so that gives me a little I guess I'd say head start as someone that wasn't in a family business you know. I been in it all my life I know what I'm doing so it kinda gives me that boost to jump in and get the ball rolling quickly and getting everything started.

Further, Brian stated, "my parents had a farm but they were both teachers so they didn't really do any farming (but supported the learner's interest in production agriculture). I have taken, gone from nothing, to being worth a whole good bit of money in a short amount of time."

Beyond family involvement, the participants stated that community members' comments and involvement in promoting learners' SAEs assisted in defining a successful SAE program. Jared stated, "… to see other people happy and excited about your work. You do work for them just to see them happy. You're making someone happy so it makes you feel good about yourself."

Finally, the participants discussed the involvement of their teacher in the development of their SAE program. Agriculture teachers were recognized as a significant contributor to the overall success of the participants SAE programs. In many cases, the students learned the term and requirements of an SAE program from their teachers. While many of the participants noted that their SAE programs had begun prior to their involvement in agricultural education, Kyle stated "where I kind of got my name for the SAE is my Ag teacher." Many of the participants also noted that their agriculture teacher contributed to their success in SAE. Rebecca added that her agriculture teacher "provided the opportunities and the framework for success." Tiffany added "my ag teachers have been just every step of the way … without my ag teachers I really don't think I would be here."

Income from SAE Program

The participants noted that when conducting an SAE program, making a profit and being able to save for future expenses was a component of a successful SAE program. Many of the participants noted that their SAE programs were conducted to provide them with the financial standing to attend college or technical school. Therefore, the participants believed that a component of a successful SAE program is the sheer fact that an SAE program can provide learners with the opportunity to secure financial means to support themselves and further their education. Jeremy stated that his SAE provided him with "job experience, future career, making money; to keep me afloat, to keep me going, and to keep me in college to help pay for college. Just, SAE has helped me be financially stable to be able to afford what you have to afford." The participants stated that a learner SAE program must increase in efficiency and scope in order to increase income. Aaron stated,

> I started … under our carport and a hand pump and now … we have our own building for [company] … we have an electric pump. We've (parents and participant) really kind of raised the efficiency of the product and now we are selling it large scale mainly.

Personal Satisfaction

Each of the participants agreed that a learner must reach a level of personal satisfaction with their SAE program. The participants believed that if a learner was proud of their work and able to obtain their SAE program goals that a learner's SAE program was successful. Jack stated, "are you happy doing it, are you good at it? Is it making you money? That's my three, I enjoy what I do I'm good at what I do, it makes me money, I'm happy." Tiffany said, "if you love doing what you do then it makes everything 10 times better. And enjoying what you're doing? Then it makes winning everything so much more sweeter I guess you could say." Bethany said, "I think really as long as you've grown yourself personally and prepared yourself you're more prepared for your career in whatever it is even if it's not related I'd call that a success to me."

FFA Participation, Awards, and Degrees

The focus group participants strongly believed that involvement in the National FFA Organization and being presented with an award or degree for involvement in an SAE program was a component of a successful SAE. Further, participants stated that the skills that were learned due to their involvement in FFA increased the successfulness of their SAE program. Aaron stated,

> FFA has helped through my success because I guess its taught me the lessons, its taught me how to communicate with others especially through from the time I was a freshman in high school first getting into actual FFA and classes and everything. We were doing chapter conducting, which is a speaking contest and I am now in college on a collegiate livestock judging team, we give oral reasons I think you have to have communication skills and you have to be able to speak publically to be successful especially in a business such as mine where you are in a sales position where you are selling a product.

Ryan said,

> You know it's amazing how much it helps just to have been through the speaking events and learning different ways to talk to people 'cause it really does make a difference. You don't think about it at that point in your life when you're doing those events but later on when you look back and say you know that really did help me a lot.

Further, the participants stated that FFA awards and degrees assisted in defining success and encouraged learners to be successful in their SAE programs. Carl stated, "once I got in and started competing I wanted to continue to grow my record books so I could compete in proficiencies with my record books at the state and national level." Brian said,

> The contests and structure to proficiencies is what helps define success to an FFA member. So without opportunities to go to contest or without motivation the awards, there probably wouldn't be the drive for success because most often how the success is measured is by comparing it to other people.

Hard Work and Program Growth

The participants stated that conducting a successful SAE program is not easy. Learners must be willing to invest time and energy to ensure that their SAE program is successful. Further, the participants noted that without hard work a learner is unable to grow an SAE program in scope and sequence, especially for learners who did not grow up in production agriculture or utilize a family business for their SAE program. Kyle stated, "something that constitutes a successful SAE would be organization, and your hard work, will do you very well." Furthermore, the participants linked hard work with the growth of the learner and SAE program over time. Aaron stated, that hard work

> Is a huge part of it … uh … to go along with that I think … uh … some growth in your SAE shows a lot of success … uh … no matter if you start out tiny and grow up to just a

> medium size or if you started maybe a big farm and grow it into a huge thing but I'd say some amount of growth no matter the scale.

Complete Records

The participants equated hard work with keeping complete and detailed records. It was evident that record keeping was a skill that is essential for any SAE program to be deemed successful. Ryan said, "if you don't keep good records it's hard to show an SAE on a piece of paper and you've got to be willing to do the work. There's no way around that." Kyle stated, "if you can't keep it (SAE records) organized in books and have it ready it's not gonna do very well." The participants noted that keeping records is not the most enjoyable task of conducting an SAE program. However, the participants stated that learners must be willing to commit to keeping current, accurate, and detailed records. Albert continued with,

> You have to be able to put it on paper. You have to be willing to do it all. You can't make somebody do something they don't want to do like keeping records. You have to keep your records straight and keep them up to date.

Furthermore, the records that are kept throughout an SAE program provide learners with documentation of their decisions and financial investments. Ryan said, "you go there, you pull that, you got everything right there to look at. And, if you got, come up you know go back and look and see how your money's turned out and if you're making money or losing money." Albert said,

> It helps me practice keeping records, because on the farm you gotta keep all your records for taxes and everything so, being if you're not really good at that then your probably gonna have something go wrong so, start it early and get the practice in so if you make a mistake hopefully you make it before it really hurts you.

Finally, the researchers noted during the focus groups that the learners possessed a sense of accomplishment with their record books. Each of the participants had a hard copy of each of their record books with them during the focus groups. Throughout the focus groups, the learners utilized their record books to provide concrete examples of their SAE successes. Further, the researchers noticed that the participants utilized a variety of electronic and paper-based record keeping systems. It was noted by the researchers that both systems provided learners with accurate and complete records of their SAE programs.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications for Practice

Based on the themes identified through the examination of the data, which was guided by the objective of this study, the researchers agreed upon six conclusions. Directly following each conclusion is a discussion of recommendations and its implications for practice. While these learners were successful, at least through the current award structure initiated through the National FFA Organization, the participants were not deemed to be average agriculture learners.

Seeking to describe and bridge theory, historical philosophy, and practice is essential to find learner perceptions near the completion of their authentic SAE experience (Retallick, 2010; Wilson & Moore, 2007). It is recognized that the researchers asked learners how they defined success through SAE. Learning from participants currently immersed in their experience will yield true authentic beliefs from which to draw conclusions and recommendations for understanding (Crotty, 2010; Patton, 2002) success in SAE for SBAE and the agricultural education profession.

From this data collection the following conclusions were drawn. First, the need for learners to plan attainable and relevant SAE goals was a theme that participants stated as setting themselves up for what they perceived as success. Further, the goals for an SAE program should also be goals for learning through their authentic experience, goals that initiate career growth, and should be personal and unique to their specific SAE. Therefore the researchers recommend that SAE selection should be discovered or personal to the learner. It is also recommended that learners

should be assisted in developing personal goals for their SAE, aided to make connections to career interests based upon the SAE, and have the opportunity to realize their goals through learning from their experience. An implication-for-practice drawn from this theme indicated less focus on the monetary and the rewards structure that exist in many SAE programs and more focus on the experience and achievement, through the realization of goals, and learning in relation to learner driven goals at the onset of SAE development. Finally, this leads the researchers to offer a recommendation for further research: to investigate participant motivation at the stage of initiation of an SAE program.

Next, the participants described their perceptions of others (specifically noting: community, employers, and family members) involved in their learning and SAE as adding to the success of their experience and SAE program. The researchers concluded that outside support was essential for success in SAE. Participants noted that making their family proud and receiving support by others who were aware of their SAE and their goals of their SAE increased the successfulness of their SAE program. Further, this finding supports the utilization of interactionism as a theoretical frame. Throughout the data, the participants noted that the social learning environment, with program partners, that SAE provided promoted their success through the development and retention of new knowledge (Hamilton & Ghatala, 1994; Phipps et al., 2008; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987; Schunk, 2012; Vygotsky's, 1967). Therefore, it is recommended that a successful SAE bridges that gap from school to home/community. Participants during data collection noted this to be true at the initiation phase and helped sustain their development during their SAE program. This led the researchers to further conclude that SAE visits still were impactful to extend learning outside the school and school hours. SAE home visits should be conducted to initiate new learner SAE programs. The mission of the visit should be to educate parents about the purpose of SAE and to seek parental support and approval of the learner's goals for their SAE. Moreover, the purpose of additional visits should focus on sustaining support to further develop the learner's goals. An implication-for-practice drawn from this theme is the need for a systematic approach to an SAE home visit at the initiation stage and sustainment stage. Future research should investigate interventions utilized during SAE home visits.

The third conclusion was that money obtained from participants SAE programs was typically earmarked for specific goals the learners developed as a result of having conducted their SAE. Therefore, the researchers recommend that goals should be incorporated after the initiation of an SAE program that reflects long-term profits through engagement in the SAE. An implication-for-practice is to utilize this fact to use profits obtained through learners SAE programs to further learners' education and career goals. Future research could investigate how learners utilize monies garnered from SAE programs.

All participants agreed that FFA participation through SAE-based awards extended the classroom and award programs provide for a motivation for some learners to further their SAE. It should be concluded that the National FFA Awards Structure for SAE does provide aspiration for learners to achieve success in their SAE. It is recommended that learner SAE programs should be showcased as examples of achievement, but it should be noted that participants stated that the initiation of the program was focused more on attainable personal goals and relevant learning in their SAE. However, implications-to-practice should give consideration that learners, motivated by awards, should be informed of this opportunity once goals for their experience are set. Further, motivation to sustain an SAE should be investigated.

Participants identified that the ability to keep records aided in their successful SAE. It should be noted that all participants had hard copies of their SAE records in the room at the time of the data collection. Observations, by the researchers, during the focus groups noted that all participants were proud of their records, at times pointing to them, flipping through their records as they reflected upon the questions and follow-up questions indicted that learners were proud of their body-of-work. The researchers concluded that hard work increases learner growth and produces an experience worth recording, which develops into a sense of accomplishment when the

learner shares their recorded experiences. The observational data incorporated with the audio recorded data led the researchers to conclude that records provided a reference and a reflection for the learners' efforts. As participants looked through their records and provided input and reaction to follow-up questions regarding SAE records, it was easily noted in both researcher's field notes and observational data, that participants were reflecting and evaluating their personal goals and established success. This leads to the final conclusion that records facilitate more than a way to track money and organize award applications; but it provides to a tangible way to communicate a body of work and knowledge gained. It is recommended that records should be a staple of all learner SAE programs and that they provide a structure for personal and career goal planning.

American FFA Degree Star Finalists contributed to their definition of SAE. A successful SAE program is one that is agricultural career-based, engages learner interest through partnerships (community and industry), and can be recognized through FFA programs based on evidence of sustained personal and financial growth.

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