

Adjusting, Appeasing, and Rearranging: How Agriculture Teachers Reconcile the Demands of the Profession

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Abstract

A teacher shortage continues to plague the SBAE profession. While this shortage has been quantified and explored from the perspective of individual teachers, little research has taken a systemic approach to the problem of the SBAE teacher shortage. We posit the teacher shortage problem as inextricably linked to a convoluted job description and growing list of competencies required to be a successful agriculture teacher. The teachers in this qualitative study shared their navigation of the process of reconciliation within their landscapes of practice and regimes of competence. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, themes of adjusting, rearranging, and appeasing emerged as the key ways in which SBAE teachers reconciled the competing demands of the profession. We discuss these findings specific to these participants, but also in terms of implications and recommendations for the broader profession, administrators, alumni groups, researchers, and teacher educators, noting especially the need for change at the professional level to reduce the reconciliation load on practicing SBAE teachers.

Keywords: adjusting; appeasing; community; expectations; rearranging; reconciliation; teacher attrition

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Introduction and Literature Review

A Nationwide shortage of agriculture teachers has been a fact of life for the past several years...Teacher educators and supervisors are reluctant to speak out on behalf of improvement of the position of the teacher. They are more concerned with improving the teacher so he can presumably do everything regardless of conditions. It is not a realistic expectation that one teacher can operate programs in production agriculture, cooperative education, young farmer education, adult farmer education, FFA, and work for a master's degree all in one school term yet, the new teacher goes to the job feeling that all of these are expected.

In the above excerpt of the 1974 February issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine*, then editor Martin B. McMillion implored his readers to critically address the position description and demands of agriculture teachers as the source of the agriculture teacher shortage. Decades later, this problem continues to plague the profession with consistent shortages in the number of agriculture teachers entering the profession relative to those leaving (Foster et al., 2015; Kantrovich, 2010; Smith et al, 2016, 2017, 2019). Interestingly, despite McMillion's call to reduce the workload of agriculture teachers, the position description has only expanded since 1974 (Talbert et al., 2014; The National

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Council, 2017). Today, agriculture teachers must possess numerous skills including those related to classroom instruction (Larsen, 1992; Miller et al., 1988), program management, student relationship management (Luft & Thompson, 1995; Miller et al., 1988), personal characteristics, and conflict management (Foster & Finley 1995), among others. These expanding position descriptions are coupled with studies concluding agriculture teachers must possess 30, 40, or even 50 characteristics or qualities to be considered effective (Easterly, et al., 2017; Eck et al., 2019; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Roberts et al., 2006). We argue these expanding position descriptions, combined with growing lists of characteristics of effective SBAE teachers (Easterly, et al., 2017; Eck et al., 2019; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Roberts et al., 2006) pose a significant hurdle to the successful retention of SBAE teachers.

Like McMillion, many scholars have questioned how these expectations affect the agriculture teacher. Not surprisingly, extant research has shown the intense workload and multiple expectations of agriculture teachers resulted in long work weeks, stress (Torres et al, 2009), the struggle to manage the various expectations of the job (Mundt & Connors, 1999; Myers et al., 2005; Rocca & Washburn, 2006), difficulty managing work and non-work obligations (Murray et al., 2011; Solomonson & Retallick, 2018; Sorensen & McKim, 2014; Sorensen et al., 2016) and in some cases, deciding to leave the profession before retirement (Cole, 1984; Dillon, 1978; Lemons et al., 2015; Solomonson & Retallick, 2018). While this literature has revealed much about the state of the profession, scholars have implied in their recommendations that "improving the teacher," as McMillion (1974) put it, through professional development and enhanced pre-service training, is the main solution to the aforementioned problems.

Emerging research, however, heeded McMillion's call to change the focus from improving the teacher to identifying other contextual factors that may contribute to the retention issue with the goal of better understanding how agriculture teachers interact with the SBAE system. For example, our previous research revealed early career agriculture teachers in Oregon experienced tension as they strove to be both a successful agriculture teacher (i.e., winning awards and building programs) and a balanced agriculture teacher (i.e., physical and mental well-being) (Traini et al., 2019). In a replication of this study with early career Louisiana agriculture teachers, we found participants experienced a success trap (Traini et al., 2020). Once they experienced initial success as a result of attending to the multiple expectations of the job, they felt it difficult to step back to rethink their workload and find success other areas in their life (e.g., time spent with family). Our continued work in this area found agriculture teachers encountered challenges as they attended to the different expectations of multiple accountability partners such as school administrators, community members, and parents (Traini et al., 2021). Navigating the competing demands of the profession was fraught with struggle, self-consciousness, and comparison (Traini et al., 2021). We recommended additional exploration into how agriculture teachers reconcile the competing demands and expectations of their work, and this study addresses that recommendation.

Research supports the challenge agriculture teachers face as they navigate their work and the expectations that go along with it. Yet, without further investigation into the ways agriculture teachers interact with the SBAE system, and the challenges that accompany it, we are unable to make definitive recommendations for change at the systems level or the position description, as McMillion (1974) put it. Continual investigation, like those mentioned above, will further shed light on how agriculture teachers respond to the demanding expectations of their work and the challenges accompanying those responses.

Theoretical Framework

We used Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) *Landscapes of Practice* to explore how agriculture teachers reconcile the competing demands of the profession as they engaged in the social landscape of SBAE. This theory situates learning in the context of our lived experiences, where learning is a component of our human nature and individuals construct identities as they participate in

multiple communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). When considering the work of professional occupations, Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) positioned individuals as accountable to their profession's body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is not simply a set of textbooks or exam questions but rather a community of people "who contribute to the continued vitality, application, and evolution of the practice" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 13). This social body of knowledge is not bound to a single community of practice. Instead, professionals engage in and belong to multiple communities of practice. These communities, and the boundaries between them, constitute a *landscape of practice*. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) provide three overarching characteristics of landscapes of practice, 1) they are inherently political and involve power dynamics, 2) they are grounded in local practices, and 3) they are diverse and involve multiple boundaries of practice that cannot subsume each other.

We can think about SBAE as its own landscape of practice, comprised of multiple communities of practice and the boundaries between them. These communities may look different for each individual, school, or state. However all may involve similar communities. Each individual community contributes to the SBAE body of knowledge in its own unique way, although overlaps and intersections between communities exist too. As they go about their work, agriculture teachers traverse the SBAE landscape, occupying different spaces and participating in different communities at any given time.

As agriculture teachers traverse this landscape, they build their identity. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) postulated identity combines multiple forms of membership in different communities of practice, or a nexus of *multimembership*. This process requires reconciliation, which is challenging identity work. Reconciliation goes beyond simply complying with different rules and norms in order to meet the demands of different communities. Rather, it is a constructed negotiation of an identity; one must reconcile competing forms of accountability in order to situate oneself in the world (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). As we do this, we are constantly striving for some form of coexistence within our nexus of multimembership. For example, a young woman who is both a parent and agriculture teacher must reconcile different aspects of her identity if she has an evening FFA meeting. Here, she must reconcile her multimembership by choosing which *regime of competence* (i.e., that of a good mother or good agriculture teacher) she feels most accountable to at that moment. As we think about agriculture teachers, and acknowledge they are engaged in multiple communities, each with possibly different expectations and regimes of competence, there may be many (even daily) circumstances requiring reconciliation. Given these theoretical concepts, *Landscapes of Practice* offers a way of thinking that acknowledges the difficult work professionals undertake in navigating the multiple communities they engage, and the boundaries between them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how agriculture teachers reconcile the demands of the profession using Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) Landscapes of Practice as a theoretical lens. The specific research question that guided our study was, *in what ways do agriculture teachers reconcile the demands of the profession?*

Methods

Utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this study explored how agriculture teachers reconcile the competing demands of the profession. Phenomenology is rooted in the personal knowledge and subjectivity of the participants, and focuses on their perspectives and interpretations of their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology accepts that researchers cannot ignore their own experiences with the phenomenon (bracketing) and allows the phenomenon to be explored through the experiences in which the individuals were engaged in everyday life, rather than a physical, objective reality that is removed from the individual (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). We approached the phenomenon of *reconciliation* with the assumption that all secondary agriculture

teachers must reconcile competing demands, within and apart from their careers as agriculture teachers, and therefore have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990).

The ontological and epistemological orientations we brought to this study align with the major tenets of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) social learning theory as well as constructivism and pragmatism. While Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) clearly separated themselves from these theoretical perspectives, they have recognized their social learning theory as one that draws from various anthropological, educational, and psychological roots. Additionally, we align with a pragmatic research paradigm, a worldview that seeks practical significance to research investigations, rejects philosophical dualisms, and views knowledge, truth, and meaning as tentative (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As a team of authors, we come from various agricultural backgrounds and have experience teaching agriculture at the secondary level. We are also currently engaged in activities, program administration, and teaching of future and current secondary agriculture teachers and are embedded in the social landscape of SBAE. The current study is not only a meaningful exercise in scholarship, but a practical one as we are continually looking for ways to enhance the SBAE landscape for those traversing it. Given this, we exercised caution throughout the research process as our experiences posed potential for trustworthiness threats. To attend to this, we employed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility to the study, detailed below (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Data utilized for this investigation were collected as part of a larger study exploring several aspects of secondary agriculture teachers' participation in SBAE landscapes of practice. Participants were secondary agriculture teachers who taught during the 2018-2019 academic year. We recruited teachers who won the NAAE Early Career Teacher Award and the NAAE Outstanding Agriculture Educator Award. For comparison, we also recruited teachers who were in their first ten years of teaching agriculture and had not won either of the NAAE awards. We used van Manen's (1990) participant selection criteria to guide our process. Each participant was selected based on their experience with the phenomenon under investigation, namely, navigating and reconciling multiple regimes of competence in a nexus of multimembership. As such, we positioned competence as recognized through NAAE with a nationally recognized award structure. We also recruited individuals at varying stages of their career and from different state contexts. While this diversity would be a threat in some qualitative methodologies, potential diversity of experience, in this case, enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study as we focused on interaction with the phenomenon rather than demographic characteristics (van Manen, 1990). We selected participants from these three groups for three main reasons. First, we wanted to include individuals who were nationally recognized as "successful" agriculture teachers and compare those to individuals who had not won awards. This was of particular interest given the theoretical framework. Second, we chose to include NAAE winners at early career stages as well as in their mid-late career stages (those that won NAAE Outstanding Agricultural Educator award) to again compare differences in experiences. Third, we wanted to collect stories from agriculture teachers who work in different states, where the context is slightly different. For the third group, we sought names and contact emails from teacher educators in the five Western states (California, Idaho, Oregon, Utah, and Washington) where the lead researcher had direct access to the teacher educators by way of personal relationships. Besides the years of experience and lack of NAAE national recognition, no other criteria were provided to the teacher educators. Following email recruitment, we had 12 participants agree to participate in our study (see Table 1).

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Name	Gender	State	Marital Status	# Yrs. Ag. Teaching	Engaged in SBAE in H.S.?	NAAAE Winner?	Number of Ag Teachers at School
Teresa	Female	Oklahoma	Widowed	9	Yes	Yes	1
Connor	Male	Oregon	Married	12	Yes	Yes	1
Paige	Female	North Carolina	Married	6	Yes	Yes	2
Megan	Female	Washington	Married	4	Yes	No	3
Mark	Male	Utah	Married	4	No	No	1
Stephen	Male	Utah	Married	9	Unknown	No	4
Madison	Female	Idaho	Married	2	Yes	No	2
Allison	Female	California	Unmarried	2	Yes	No	3
Joey	Male	California	Married	5	Yes	No	4
Eddie	Male	California	Married	4	Yes	No	3
Liberty	Female	Oregon	Married	4	Yes	No	2
Natalie	Female	Oregon	Engaged	4	Yes	No	1

Data Collection and Analysis

We primarily collected data via semi-structured interviews over the telephone. The interview protocol—refined after being piloted with four agriculture teachers who did not participate in this study—allowed participants the opportunity to share their experiences navigating the multiple demands and expectations of their jobs. For example, we asked questions about their professional responsibilities, how they managed their time, to whom they felt accountable, how they defined success, and how they reconciled any tensions they felt as they went about their work. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, were transcribed verbatim, and imported into Dedoose software for analysis. Data for this study were collected in accordance with [University's] Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and all participants voluntarily gave verbal consent.

The tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology support the interpretation of meanings in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990). We utilized Lindseth and Norberg's (2004) method for interpreting hermeneutic interview text and Emerson et al.'s (2011) method for specific coding and memoing guidelines. We also drew from van Manen's (1990) conceptualization of *theme* in phenomenological research. This process began with several rounds of naïve reading (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) and was followed with a series of open coding, theme selection, and focused coding (Emerson et al., 2011). Comprehensive memos helped the development of individual themes and sub-themes, helped build descriptions and explanations of specific codes, and created links between themes and sub-themes. Once we developed initial themes and sub-themes, we returned to examining the interviews from start to finish again, then compared the results of the thematic analysis to the naïve understandings. Collaborative discourse among co-authors, critical reflection, and written reflexive memos were integrated throughout data analysis to enhance trustworthiness and ensure the themes aligned with the research question (Schwandt, 1997; van Manen, 1990).

Building Quality into the Study

We used Lincoln and Guba's (1988) criteria of *transferability*, *credibility*, and *dependability* and Malterud's (2001) call for *reflexivity* to ensure this study was conducted in a rigorous and scientific way. We employed thick description to ensure findings of this study are transferable, to a different

content or study. Stake (2010) claimed thick description "provides abundant, interconnected details" about the participants, contexts, and themes, thus enhancing the ability for the reader to determine if the results may be transferred to a different research setting (p. 49). We employed thick description by describing the participants and findings in rich detail and grounding our claims with ample illustrative quotes and anecdotes from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The co-authors also enhanced credibility and dependability of this study as peer reviewers. Creswell (2013) recommended peer reviews of debriefing as a means to keep the researcher honest. Peer reviewers ensure the researcher is engaging in rigorous and ethical practices by asking them difficult questions, serving as a devil's advocate, and reviewing the research findings (Creswell, 2013). These individuals should also be familiar with the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990). This invitation to engage in hermeneutic conversations allowed the lead researcher to "put out there" her preliminary findings and engage in discussion with scholars about how her findings aligned/did not align with the themes in relation to their own experiences. We also utilized member checking as a tool to enhance the credibility of the findings and counterbalance flaws inherent in a single data collection method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Maxwell, 2012) by asking participants to review transcripts and initial drafts of the analysis, and offer additional stories related to the research question.

Reflexivity

While it is impossible to remove all researcher theories and lenses during the research process (Maxwell, 2012), we, as scholars, can enhance objectivity through strong reflexivity (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). This can be achieved if the researcher subjects themselves to the same scrutiny as their participants. By examining the cultural assumptions that situate the research, the researcher legitimizes her knowledge claims (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Reflexivity is especially important to consider in hermeneutical phenomenological research as the researcher moves beyond mere description and into interpretation of the phenomenon. Finlay (2009) challenged hermeneutic phenomenologists to participate in critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity and engage in a dialectic movement between the experiences of participants and their own preunderstandings of the phenomenon. We accomplished this by making personal, epistemological, theoretical, and practical struggles explicit throughout the manuscript and by making the meaning-making process not only visible to the reader, but an integral part of the storyline. In this paper, we enhanced reflexivity by inserting autoethnographic vignettes into the findings (Humphreys, 2005), which serve as a means to make clear our movements around the hermeneutic circle while adding richness and depth to the writing.

Findings

As the agriculture teachers who participated in this study lived and worked in the SBAE landscape, they reconciled competing demands and expectations while striving to be seen as good, successful, or competent. They did this by *adjusting*, *rearranging*, or *appeasing* to placate the expectations of others within the landscape (Table 2).

Table 2

Qualitative Themes, Acts toward Power, and Definition

Theme	Act toward Power	Definition
Adjusting	Against	Arrangements to retain individual agency
Rearranging	With	Compromised retention of power for both parties
Appeasing	For	Yields agency to the powers in place

Adjusting, rearranging, and appeasing captured the experiences of all twelve participants. We also observed, however, distinct differences between the three groups of teachers, and we made those distinctions explicit in the text below. As we present these three themes, we also offer three autoethnographic vignettes, written by the lead author, that expose connections to the phenomenon and

make her movements around the hermeneutic circle clear. These vignettes include personal reflections from particular lines of data, memories of experiences as an agriculture teacher, and methodological interludes.

Adjusting

The adjusting theme emerged from codes focused on reconciling ones' power against others' power. This adjusting moved things around, but allowed the individual to retain some of their own agency. These SBAE teachers accomplished adjusting by prioritizing tasks and responsibilities as well as adjusting their expectations of success.

Agriculture teachers in this study recognized the inability to do everything all the time. To reconcile this, they prioritized, which involved giving certain tasks or responsibilities more devotion and/or precedence. In addition, they intentionally postponed by devoting less energy to quality of work, or forgoing certain tasks altogether. This was both normal and necessary. For example, Eddie discussed weeks when multiple obligations "pile up" and prioritization was used as a necessary mechanism to cope with the demanding nature of the job: "you learn what needs to happen now and what can wait--not that you want to put anything off--but there's things that need to be put off so you can figure the rest of your life out." Similarly, Stephen, discussed prioritization as something to "deal with." He shared, "what's the priority? It changes probably on a daily basis. Some days, we're asked to do this thing for school, then another day that priority changes back and no, I'm going home to do my own thing."

While all twelve participants discussed the difficulty in attending to all aspects of their job and the importance of prioritization as a necessary concept, many commented on the importance and high priority of their classroom, curriculum, and daily lesson planning. This was the case for Mark who stated, "the people that keep me working are my students, so I have to take care of them. So that's going to be the last ball that drops right there, making sure my students get what they need." Natalie, too, placed classroom instruction as a high priority, although she admitted sometimes she forgot this in lieu of her FFA responsibilities, "often times, I catch myself spending so much time on that vague point of my job and then realizing that, first, I'm hired to be a classroom teacher, and I might need to set that aside."

As agriculture teachers in this study sought to provide their students with the same experiences they received in high school, and witnessed the work and success of other agriculture teachers, they built conceptualizations of success equating to winning awards through FFA competitions and events. However, as they engaged in their profession, many struggled to be as competitive as they would have liked. This was problematic for them and tugged on their identity as an agriculture teacher. To reconcile, they adjusted their expectations, lowered their standards, and tried to convince themselves winning and competition did not align with their students or community but rather students' experiences were what truly mattered. This was the case for six participants, all of whom were in their first five years of teaching. The tension between winning and adjusting emerged as they discussed their own definitions of success, whether they perceived others would deem them successful, and if they identified themselves as successful. For a few participants, they seemed content with this adjustment. For others, it was evident they were still grappling with adjustment as they strove to shift focus to student and community needs as metrics of "winning". Competitive teams were so engrained in their conceptualization of a "good" agriculture teacher that it made any other definition futile. To reconcile this, they often adjusted their expectations and tried to reconceptualize success. This was the case for Allison, who reflected on how she had to significantly adjust her definition of success. She described this as challenging, and something that particularly tugged on her identity:

I've had to really take a step back and realize what it means to my students to be successful more than what it means to me because my definition wasn't working for them. So I've had to

adjust to that a lot, which has been really challenging to me...I'm still trying to figure out my identity, who exactly I want to be.

Perhaps Madison put it most poignantly as she connected notions of success to her agriculture teacher identity:

I would say that your idea of being successful is going to influence how you see yourself and your effectiveness and your position. I'm not sure if it was out of self-preservation or whatever that I changed my definition of success, but it has helped motivate me as a teacher, because if I was basing my personal value off of how competitive my FFA teams were, I would be such a loser and so sad all the time.

Interestingly, participants seemed unconvinced in their endeavor to reconcile through adjusting their expectations. In the evidence presented, Allison and Madison discussed adjustments more as coping mechanisms than avenues of reconciliation.

Autoethnographic Vignette 1 - A Rock and a Hard Place

I feel like I always get caught in this rock and a hard place, where like, okay, I'm doing the right thing by leaving work right now and going to the gym, and taking care of myself and my body; but I should be [at school] until 7:00, because other ag teachers do. I have this guilt. You know, as I look at other ag teachers and see what they're doing sometimes, I can see, "Oh, they're out with students right now doing this. And here I am, you know, cooking dinner." It makes me feel guilty that I should be out there doing the same thing. - *Natalie*

OH I FEEL YOU! Natalie's comment resonated with me at my core. What does it mean when we feel guilty for cooking ourselves dinner?!? What does it mean if she felt she should be either working or cooking dinner for herself? When did it become acceptable to work until 7pm in the first place? Shouldn't one relish the idea of a home-cooked meal after a long day at work? Shouldn't this be the norm rather than a guilt-induced action? This story both distresses me and brings back so many memories of when I felt the same way. I remember one way I thought I remedied this "rock and a hard place." I thought I was clever. I thought I could do it all and be good. In 2014, I decided to coach the Agricultural Sales Career Development Event (CDE) specifically because it only had three (just three!) weekend competitions (as opposed to 6+ for the other CDEs). I told myself, "See, I'm going to conquer this work-life balance thing AND be successful by winning a state championship but not having to work as hard for it." And guess what, I did win (I as in the team I coached. I recognize there are inherent flaws in my language here). I won twice, in both 2014 and 2015. Unfortunately, our state supervisor failed to mention this on stage when he announced all the state winners, and he failed to put it in the FFA Magazine. I thought, "What's the point of being good if no one notices? If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" Perhaps I had not conquered this work-life balance thing after all. I did not get what I hoped out of the "work" end of the deal. My effort in coaching was inadequate; it did not exist if no one recognized me for it. As I reflect now, I did this for all the wrong reasons. Sure, it was fun. Sure, I loved my students and enjoyed the time I spent with them. But winning wasn't about them at all. It was about me. What does that mean?

Rearranging

Rearranging involved reconciling one's power with others' power (individual, institutional, or otherwise). This rearranging emerged through codes that expressed moving things around to allow compromised retention of power for both parties. Participants in this study rearranged through leveraging, striving to create boundaries, delegating, and molding their family to their job. Participants leveraged existing resources and networks, embedded multiple activities into one event, and integrated FFA activities into the classroom curriculum. This largely surfaced as participants discussed managing the different responsibilities of the job. In the below excerpt, Mark shared his strategies of leverage:

I can embed CDEs into my class and that, in a way, helps me check off two boxes. Farm to School, I try and invest as much of that as I can into my classes, at least the planting and the preparation and the harvesting, which also takes care of some requirements for the state. So I try and get as many boxes checked on each one of my responsibilities as possible with what I do in class.

Agriculture teacher participants also rearranged by delegating their work responsibilities to volunteers. For several participants, delegation was a necessary strategy to fulfill the duties of the job. Paige relied on the help of community members to offset her workload, "There's no way my ag teacher partner and I could get everything done if it wasn't for those community members that are willing to help train CDE teams or come in and help judge something."

Participants also created boundaries between their work and home lives as a rearranging strategy. This emerged as these teachers discussed goals of leaving work "early," which they defined as when contractual hours end, devoting time for activities and relationships outside work or purposefully leaving certain weekends or evenings open when planning the year's events. However, this was something many were still striving towards and had yet to master. Teresa, in her ninth year teaching, was still learning to say 'no,' "I'm learning I don't have to have something going all the time." Similarly, Megan struggled to create boundaries and often made herself sick from overwork and excessive stress from the job. She reflected, "my first year teaching, I used all, or almost all of my sick days, some of them from being sick, some of them from, 'oh my gosh, I need to take a deep breath.'" Joey also struggled with boundaries and found it difficult to say 'no' to students, "when I say no to ag education things, I'm saying no to kids. But I also realize I have my family, I only have this one life, and I want to be able to spend it with them." Participants clearly saw the need and value of creating boundaries but struggled to establish and maintain them.

Participants often spoke of finding ways to mold their families to their job to reconcile by rearranging. This involved bringing work home instead of staying at school, bringing family to work-related activities, working excessive hours because their spouse did the same, or choosing work over family. A few participants justified their long hours at work by having supportive spouses who also worked long hours. For example, Liberty shared how, in order to fulfill her FFA and SAE responsibilities, she worked late into the evenings. When asked if she was okay with that, she responded, "it's not such a big deal and it's kind of interesting because I think it works because my husband is constantly busy with stuff as well." Participants like Liberty mostly relayed molding their families to their jobs as a positive strategy, something that worked for them. Madison, on the other hand, didn't see this as a viable approach as she considered motherhood in the future, "Yeah. I really don't have any long-term teaching goals, because I don't know what's going to happen after I have kids." Rearranging, it seems, was a reconciliation strategy these teachers strove for with limited realized satisfaction.

Autoethnographic Vignette 2: On the Brink

I can feel it. I'm on the brink of it now. . . I'm getting close, I think I may have the themes and sub-themes that truly capture the data and answer my research question. How many hours has it been since I dove into the data? 40? 50? It's hard to tell. These past few weeks have been a blur of spreadsheets, codebooks, and thinking...so much thinking. I might lose my head with all this thinking...Nick must think I'm losing it, what with my every thought, every free moment dedicated to data analysis...I want to do right by my participants, capture their thoughts accurately, showcase their lived experiences, interpret these stories in a way that uncovers hidden truths, complex contexts, and rich emotions that are associated with high school Ag teaching. A hundred pages seems too little at this point. How can I do everyone's story justice? How can I accurately capture the richness, the emotion in their voices, their struggles in mere words? I've engaged in the proper steps of data analysis, been thorough, questioned my every move. But did I get it "right"? Hermeneutic phenomenology is my own

interpretation, and as a qualitative researcher, I am the research instrument. But still...will this be enough?... I've done the hard work, checked with my participants, coded and recoded, met with peer collaborators, but getting these ideas on paper in a way that does justice to my participants seems so...daunting.

Appeasing

Appeasing arose from codes where participants reconciled their power for others' power. Appeasing showed participants yielding their agency to the powers in place. This emerged as participants discussed assuaging those in power and leaving the school or profession as strategies of reconciliation. Many participants needed to make powerful individuals "happy" or "pleased" so powerful individuals would view the teacher and their program in a positive light. Participants discussed appeasement as necessary for survival, especially in regards to powerful community members and groups who potentially had leverage over the teacher's work and program. This emerged as following rules even if they did not agree with them (e.g., posting learning targets on the board, administering state skills tests for CTE classes), and as striving to make powerful individuals happy. Joey felt this as he made sure his objectives were written on the board each day, even though he didn't necessarily believe that practice would afford student success. He stated, "my principal wants us to have our objective somewhere on the board and so, you know, I always make sure to follow those kinds of rules." Powerful individuals also influenced Stephen's work, "[I make my programmatic decisions on] more of a, 'oh crap who's coming to see me today?' kind of thing." Eddie shared a similar sentiment, "there's definitely some big players in the community that we need to be aware of and make happy. When they say, "Jump," you say, "How high." You just go on with it whether you like it or not."

For several participants, they spoke about needing to please the community so that, in the event their program was threatened in any way, they would receive support from those individuals. Megan put this plainly when we asked her about the tensions she encountered from different accountability partners, "some advice we got was just make sure the community has your back. So if funding gets cut then you have your community to back you up." Appeasement was a striking theme as agriculture teachers acknowledged the political nature of teaching and SBAE. They had to "play the game" in the hope of keeping their job, maintaining student numbers, and receiving financial and material support from donors. If they didn't appease those in power, they yielded their own agency by leaving the school or the profession. For two participants, they left previous positions due to conflicts and misaligned expectations from various accountability partners.

Autoethnographic Vignette 3: Internal Dialogue

"I don't know, it just seems kind of natural at this point." - Liberty

When I was teaching high school agriculture, I was one of six full-time agriculture teachers. I taught two different classes or "preps" in a semester. Just two, yet my days and weekends were devoted to lesson planning and lab preparation. Grading, planning, classroom organization, copies, accommodations, and other classroom teacher duties (parent meetings, 504/IEP meetings, staff meetings) was a full-time job in it of itself. Like all Ag teachers though, I coached teams (a couple speakers, a couple CDE teams), and had several other responsibilities (FFA committees, SAE project visits, etc.). My schedule was FULL. I worked until at least 5 or 6pm most days, went home exhausted, and struggled to stay awake until 8pm. If weekends weren't spent planning or on FFA trips, they were spent recovering and getting ready for the next week. There was no time and no energy for anything else. How then, is it possible for my participants to teach 6 or 7 different preps, coach 15 teams, manage facilities, and run an entire program by themselves or with one other person all without any tension or conflict?! Is there something I'm missing here? Do some of these Ag teachers have super-human powers? As I listened to the interviews and combed through the interview transcripts, I struggled to make sense of this and wondered why participants aren't revealing conflicts or tensions that emerge in their work. Why would you hide the difficulties in your work? For fear of being judged? Critiqued?

Seen as less than perfect? I know that was the case for me. I ran myself ragged trying to do it all. Am I projecting these same feelings on my participants? Or is this a "thing?"

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This hermeneutic phenomenology explored how secondary agriculture teachers reconciled the demands of the profession while striving to be seen as good, successful, or competent. Recall Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) offered the concept of reconciliation as a way professionals must attend to the multiple communities of practice in which they operate as they navigate their nexus of multimembership. This struggle for coexistence was clearly evidenced in the data as agriculture teachers reflected on how they reconcile the competing demands of the profession through adjusting, rearranging, and appeasing.

Adjusting involved reconciling one's power against others' power, moving things around while retaining some agency. Participants prioritized and modified their expectations of success. As practicing SBAE teachers seek to adjust, we wonder how they are prioritizing. For instance, while participants were quick to identify classroom instruction—lesson design and delivery—as a priority, student assessments via grading were less important and something that was often postponed until a more convenient time. Employing Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) perspective, it is possible participants were quick to put grading aside as there were other tasks and responsibilities to which they felt more accountable (e.g., community or administration pressures) (Traini et al., 2021).

A few participants implied that while prioritization was an important strategy, it was an incomplete one for reconciling the demands of the profession. This is not surprising given that previous literature consistently concludes the difficulty of attending to and managing the various aspects of the profession (Baxter et al., 2011; Boone & Boone, 2009; Rocca & Washburn, 2008; Stair et al., 2012). The evidence from this study and others requires us to ask: as teachers seek to meet multiple regimes of competence simultaneously, how useful is prioritization as a strategy? What activities or responsibilities are deemed more important and why? Further research should explore the decision-making strategies used in an effort to identify the reasons specific duties or responsibilities are given more attention than others.

Our research highlighted the internal adjustments teachers make as they wrestle conceptualizing competitiveness and success. As they adjust their expectations and retain some of their own agency, it appeared some adjustment is simply a coping mechanism. Such a mechanism allowed teachers to mentally elevate the importance of their current obligations and minimize the importance of competitive success, namely winning awards and seeing recognized student or chapter success. This aligns with our recent studies (Traini et al., 2019, 2020) that found agriculture teachers often equated winning awards and competitions with success in the profession. This theme is especially interesting in light of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) claim that regimes of competence are socially negotiated within the community. Knowing this, practicing agriculture teachers seeking to alter certain competencies must convince others in the community that a new, revised competency is deemed worthwhile and legitimate. This is challenging work, especially if regimes of competence are tied to history, the culture of the town, and the school's identity.

The second theme, rearranging, involved reconciling one's power with others' power by reorganizing to allow compromised retention of power for both parties. Participants in this study rearranged through leveraging, striving to create boundaries, delegating, and molding their family to their job. In particular, participants discussed the importance of delegating their work responsibilities to volunteers (i.e., "delegated others," "coaches," or "community members") and how the use of volunteers helped them reconcile their work responsibilities. The necessity to engage others to fulfill one's job description begs the question, do agriculture teachers simply have too many responsibilities? The findings from this study and others (Hainline et al., 2015 & Lemons et al., 2015) seem to suggest so. Perhaps the profession should heed Lemons et al.'s (2015) call and reexamine the current paradigm

of agricultural education or Hainline et al.'s (2015) suggestion to reduce the number of agriculture teacher responsibilities.

One strategy for rearranging was to mold your family to the job. Participants highlighted strategies including bringing work home instead of staying at school, bringing family to work-related activities, working excessive hours because their spouse does the same, or choosing work over family. Interestingly, these findings also mirrored the literature on work-life balance. Sorensen et al. (2016) concluded that the number of weekly hours spent at work, along with being married, were significant negative predictors of work-family balance ability. Their 2017 study found perceived family-supportive work culture, the number of agriculture teachers per school, work salience, and work hours per week were significant positive predictors of work interference with family (Sorensen et al., 2017). The current study validates these implications, noting the challenges participants expressed with rearranging work and family obligations to reconcile their work and personal life. Solomonson and Retallick (2018) found mid-career agriculture teachers who are married and have children struggle to achieve work-life balance despite successes in their careers. Given the existing research, it makes us wonder, is the strategy of molding your family to your job a warning sign of teacher attrition or simply a career-lifestyle decision? The findings from this study do not allow us to answer this question. Yet, compared to previous literature, this may be an indication that agriculture teachers who mold their families to their job will struggle to achieve work-life balance. Certainly, future research should continue to explore the work-life balance, with particular focus on the implications of molding family to job.

The third theme, appeasing, involved reconciling one's power for others' power, yielding agency to the powers in place. This emerged as participants discussed appeasing those in power and leaving the school or profession as strategies of reconciliation. Participants recognized supportive administrators as imperative and, to achieve this, they acquiesced and gave administrators what they wanted. What we do not know is the nature and utility of having the support of administrators. Is it providing financial support, job security, or material resources that are critical to run the agriculture program? We know from the literature that administrative support is tied to agriculture teacher retention (Clark et al., 2014; Haddad et al., 2019). Yet, it is unclear how administrative support specifically contributes to their decision to stay in the profession.

Many participants also conveyed the need to appease powerful people. This extended into the community as several participants expressed needing to please the community so, in the event their program was threatened in any way, they would receive support from those individuals. From afar, the relationships between community members and agriculture teachers seem symbiotic; agriculture teachers get various support from community members and community members get the "product" they want--students with vocational skills, and CDE recognition. Yet, our participants implied this relationship was more skewed. The power seemed to be mostly in the hands of the community as they appear to guide programmatic decision-making and hold significant leverage over programs. This points to the importance and power of such individuals, which may make navigating the SBAE landscape challenging as agriculture teachers strive to attend to the multiple accountability partners and regimes of competence (Traini et al., 2021). Future research should explore these relationships as it could provide insight into the various challenges agriculture teachers undergo and how they go about navigating those challenges.

The theme of appeasement is particularly thought-provoking given Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) characterization of landscapes of practice as political. They argue power dynamics define competence, knowledge hierarchies exist, and competing voices make knowledge claims. We argue agriculture teachers in this study were keenly aware of the power dynamics existing in their landscapes, and they do what they must to ensure those powerful individuals get what they want. These teachers expressed appeasement as necessary for both survival and support. Agriculture teachers acknowledged the political nature of teaching and SBAE, so they "played the game" hoping to keep their jobs, maintained student numbers, and received financial and material support from

donors. Future investigations should illuminate the power dynamics within SBAE, particularly those connected to school administration and influential community members. Perhaps, if we were more aware of the power dynamics across the landscape, teacher educators, state associations, and teacher mentors could help agriculture teachers navigate them.

Some agriculture teachers reconciled the competing demands of living and working in the landscape of SBAE by migrating to a new school or considered leaving the profession altogether. For two participants, they left previous positions due to conflicts and misaligned expectations from various accountability partners. In addition, four participants in this study left or were considering leaving the profession at the time of data collection largely for reasons present in the literature, including unsupportive administrators, misaligned expectations, and the demanding nature of the job (Cole 1884; Knight, 1978; Lemons et al., 2015; Solomonson & Retallick, 2018). While the results from this study do not allow us to conclude agriculture teachers will leave the profession if they are unable to reconcile the competing demands of the profession, this finding causes concern. Future research specifically attending to agriculture teacher attrition should consider the connections between reconciliation and the decision to leave the profession.

While much exploration remains to understand how agriculture teachers traverse the SBAE landscape, we can offer practical recommendations to aid the journey. Participants mentioned the desire to create stronger boundaries in their lives as a necessary strategy for reconciliation, yet many struggled to do this. We recommend teacher educators and other subject-matter experts host workshops and provide resources to empower agriculture teachers to reclaim their boundaries by equipping them with specific strategies to do so. As first and second authors on this paper, we have hosted several workshops for agriculture teachers across the country about identifying boundaries, recognizing the signs and symptoms of ignored or crossed boundaries, and incorporating strategies to reclaim boundaries in work and life. These workshops have resulted in rich discussion and, anecdotally, have empowered agriculture teachers with the courage and agency to reclaim their boundaries.

We also encourage practicing agriculture teachers to have conversations with various accountability partners, including administrators and community members, about their expectations of the agriculture teacher and agriculture program (Traini et al., 2021). Alumni and Advisory groups could engage in exercises that allow the acknowledgment of what teachers in their communities are asked to do and opportunities (e.g., expectations lists, lists of resources) that provide non-threatening support. For administrators, we recommend exploring concessions regarding teacher expectations, including the use of activities directors, considering timing and amount of preparatory periods, scheduling of agriculture classes, and compensation, to name a few. Lastly, as a profession, it may be useful to compile a succinct yet flexible position description of the agriculture teaching job detailing tasks that are expected as well as those that are not expected. Of course, this would likely be a contested document, especially without sufficient empirical evidence from research to support it. However, if compiled, this document could be used by various individuals (e.g., alumni groups, state associations) to advocate for the agriculture teacher in a way that is more removed from individual circumstances, whether it be the agriculture teacher, local politics, or other factors.

Over forty years ago, Martin B. McMillion challenged the profession to improve the position description of secondary agriculture teachers, noting unrealistic expectations to fulfill the excessive responsibilities of the job. We learned from this study that agriculture teachers engaged in significant work to reconcile these responsibilities. Doing this work often requires agriculture teachers to look to established leaders for validation in their reconciliation process. For those of us in teacher education, we are often looked to as leaders in the profession. How do we help shape this critical process of reconciliation and identity work? Do our words and actions validate or invalidate teachers as they traverse this challenging landscape? As a profession, we need to consider what the state of the profession is and challenge ourselves with what it should be. How can we make positive change at the professional level to help our teachers reconcile? We know teachers are struggling with reconciliation.

We now know they are adjusting, rearranging, and appeasing in an effort to survive. What will we do to support these efforts? Or better yet, reduce the need for them?

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