

Teacher Retention: A Relational Perspective

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Abstract

The sustained shortage of school-based agricultural educators necessitates novel research into variables impacting teacher career commitment. In the current study, a previously unexplored variable in the prediction of career commitment within school-based agricultural education was considered, teacher connectivity. Four elements of teacher connectivity (i.e., within school, other SBAE teachers, curricular, and community) were analyzed in relation to career commitment among a national sample of school-based agricultural educators. Findings revealed teachers perceived the highest levels of connectivity to their curriculum and other SBAE teachers with the lowest levels of connectivity being with other content area teachers and administrators in their own school. Using multiple linear regression, the four elements of connectivity predicted 12% of the variance in career commitment. School connectivity and SBAE teacher connectivity were identified as statistically significant, positive predictors of career commitment. Findings are discussed using the Relational Theory of Working with recommendations emerging for structuring teacher onboarding programs, increasing teacher mentoring efforts, and empowering teachers to engage in interdisciplinary lesson planning. Further, authors provide recommendations for continued scholarship exploring teacher connectivity and career commitment within school-based agricultural education.

Keywords: career commitment; community connectivity; curriculum connectivity; school-based agriculture teacher connectivity; school connectivity

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Introduction

Teacher retention is one of the most common, and important, topics of study within school-based agricultural education (SBAE). It is well known that a nationwide shortage of teachers has existed for some time, with various factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave or remain in the profession. Retaining effective teachers, however, is essential to the sustainability of the discipline; teachers exiting the profession results in instability, program closures, and reduced opportunities for students (Lawver et al., 2018; Rinke, 2007).

Unfortunately, SBAE teachers leaving the profession is all too common. Existing research suggests between 30-50% of teachers will leave the profession within the first five years of employment (Blackburn et al., 2017; Hong, 2010; Rinke, 2007). Additionally, in 2018 there were 1,594 open positions nationwide within school-based agricultural education (SBAE) due to teachers retiring, moving to new schools, or leaving the teaching profession entirely (Smith et al., 2019). Of these open

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positions, 576 were filled by alternatively certified individuals, non-licensed hires, or went unfilled (Smith et al., 2019).

Studies in SBAE seeking predictors of teacher retention have focused on common, overarching themes, such as self-efficacy (Blackburn et al., 2017; McKim & Velez, 2015, 2017). Research on professions outside SBAE, however, has explored a broader range of factors potentially influencing the retention of employees, with many studies citing workplace connections playing a critical role in the decision of employees to remain in their respective professions (Coldwell, 2017; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Hong, 2010; Hope, 1999; Rinke, 2007). Research on connectivity within the profession is critical as SBAE is different from other content areas. On average, SBAE teachers face more tasks than other teachers, averaging 55 to 60 hour work weeks (Sorensen et al., 2016). SBAE-unique expectations include teaching a wider variety of content areas, advising the FFA chapter, facilitating supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs, and working with community stakeholders (Clemons & Lindner, 2019; Murray et al., 2011; Sorensen et al., 2016). A fresh perspective on teacher retention within SBAE, one that explores new predictors, could uncover promising avenues for research and practice. Informed by research on the importance of connectivity to professional resilience and retention, the current study provides a new approach by exploring the relationship between SBAE teacher connectivity and career commitment.

Literature Review

Our exploration of the relationship between connectivity and career commitment among SBAE teachers is informed by existing research on connectivity, career commitment, and the relationship between the two constructs. Therefore, the literature review is organized in alignment with the constructs and relationships of interest within the current study.

Connectivity

Social connections are an inherent part of human life (Stephens et al., 2011). Humans crave social interaction and belonging in both their personal and professional lives. Focusing on professional connectivity, Dutton and Heaphy (2003) explored the role of workplace connections and found the level (or degree) of connections workers perceived was directly related to job satisfaction and organizational success. Additionally, Dutton and Heaphy (2003) found the prevalence of high-quality connections as the most important variable in determining employee retention. In their study, high-quality connections were defined as having (a) higher emotional carrying capacity, (b) resilience, and (c) a high degree of connectivity (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

Existing research highlights the importance of connectivity to professional success; however, what areas of connectivity exist within SBAE? In the current study, we explore four unique areas of SBAE teacher connectivity to lay a foundation for understanding this important construct within the discipline. The first construct is school connectivity, the connections SBAE teachers perceive within their school district. School connectivity includes relationships with non-SBAE teachers and school administrators. Within education, the connections teachers develop create schoolwide support systems, improving school culture and emotional support (Rinke, 2007; Sass et al., 2011). The importance of administrative support is not foreign to SBAE work. Multiple studies have identified the importance of perceived support among colleagues and administrators within a district to directly affect teacher longevity and success (Clemons & Lindner, 2019; Hasselquist et al., 2017). Professional development (Coldwell, 2017; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014) and teacher mentoring programs (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Hope, 1999) have been identified as methods for building school connectivity.

The second construct, SBAE teacher connectivity, includes connections with fellow SBAE teachers within their school (if applicable), state, or nationally. Similar to the importance of perceived support and social interaction teachers experience within their school, disciplinary-specific support systems are essential (Sass et al., 2010). Existing research has found high levels of SBAE teacher connectivity related to increased teacher self-efficacy (Korte & Simonsen, 2018).

The third construct, curricular connectivity, describes the level of connection SBAE teachers perceive to the curriculum they teach. Existing research suggests the importance of curricular connectivity, with higher teacher autonomy and knowledge of the curriculum relating to increased job satisfaction and intentions to remain in the classroom (Clemons & Lindner, 2019; Kauffman et al., 2002). Thus, teachers with more say in their curriculum, passion, and preparation will perceive higher levels of curricular connectivity.

The final construct, community connectivity, includes the level of connectedness SBAE teachers perceive with members of their community. Given the structure of the three-circle model for SBAE, there are numerous opportunities for community member engagement in SBAE programs (Croom, 2008). The use of SAEs and the National FFA Organization allows for teachers to implement community service projects and include community partners (e.g., local businesses, community members, FFA alumni) to provide input and support (Croom, 2008; National FFA Organization, 2019a, 2019b).

Career Commitment

Given the continual demand for teachers, career commitment is a commonly studied construct throughout education. Hong (2010) identified numerous psychological factors relating to teacher career commitment, including: self-efficacy, knowledge, beliefs, and emotions. Within SBAE, self-efficacy is a frequently analyzed psychological element studied in relation to career commitment, with evidence suggesting increased self-efficacy relates to higher levels of career commitment (Blackburn & Robinson 2008; McKim & Velez, 2015, 2016). Self-efficacy refers to, “the teacher’s belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008, p. 2). Among early career SBAE teachers, low self-efficacy has been identified as one of many factors leading to teachers leaving the profession (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; McKim, 2016). Teacher turnover not only impacts the effectiveness of the school but can also have detrimental impacts on student development and school culture (Rinke, 2007).

Outside the context of self-efficacy, work-family balance is a growing area of study within research exploring SBAE teacher career commitment. Work-family balance refers to the ability of the teacher to manage time, energy, and resource allocation between their work and family domains. Research exploring the relationship between work-family balance and career commitment within SBAE suggests work-family balance is a significant, positive predictor of teacher retention (Blackburn et al., 2017; Sorensen & McKim, 2014). Just as emerging research on work-family balance has expanded our understanding of career commitment, we believe the introduction of connectivity as a predictor of career commitment will yield a more comprehensive understanding of career commitment within SBAE.

Relationship between Connectivity and Career Commitment

The research we reviewed identified high-quality connections, school culture, teacher self-efficacy, and work-family balance as important variables to understanding career commitment. A cross-cutting concept of the identified variables is connectivity. Connectivity is a critical component to social

persuasion (i.e., feedback from others regarding abilities), which is a building block to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, connectivity plays an essential role in creating a positive or negative culture within work or family domains, which directly relates to spillover (i.e., work and family intersections, either positive or negative), an element of work-family balance (Sorensen & McKim, 2014). Given the intersection between connectivity and factors identified to influence teacher retention, it is reasonable to assume connectivity is an important element of career commitment within SBAE.

Research in other educational content areas has found an increase in the connections a teacher perceives within their school district improves school culture and perceived emotional support (Korte & Simonsen, 2018; Sass et al., 2010). SBAE research supports this finding; a study by Hasselquist et al. (2017) found the amount of relationships and perceived support of novice SBAE teachers from peer teachers and administrators directly influenced their job satisfaction and self-efficacy. While studies allude to the importance of connectivity; existing research has not included an analysis of connectivity and career commitment. Further, reviewed research has not explored the various aspects of connectivity inherent in teaching SBAE (e.g., school, SBAE teacher, curricular, and community); therefore, exploring these four elements of connectivity within SBAE presents a literature-grounded, novel approach to understanding career commitment within the discipline.

Theoretical Framework

The current study, which attends to four relational elements among SBAE teachers (i.e., school, SBAE teacher, curricular, and community), was informed by the Relational Theory of Working (RTW). The RTW “provides a framework for understanding ways in which working is embedded in external and internal relational contexts” (Blustein, 2011, p. 1). The RTW emerged in response to a growing body of vocational literature which viewed employees as completely independent - existing within a relationship vacuum. In contrast, relational theories identified relationships as an essential element of human life, noting individual growth occurs via connection (Jordan, 2008).

Expanding upon foundational relational theories, RTW posits work is a relational act and that all decisions and experiences within the work context are shaped by relationships. Further, the RTW links relationships within a work context to career commitment, or resilience, suggesting “relational influences...shape the resilience that is necessary for individuals to manage the ever-increasing complexity of work challenges” (Blustein, 2011, p. 2). The connection between relationships and career commitment suggested within RTW has been evaluated among teachers, with findings supporting relationships as essential to overcoming adversity and building career commitment (Doney, 2013; LeCornu, 2009).

While existing research within the field of education supports relationships being an important element of career commitment, this postulation has not been explicitly investigated in SBAE. Further, research associating relationships with career commitment among teachers has not analyzed the diversity of relationships managed by teachers. Therefore, the current study seeks to expand upon the RTW by analyzing four elements of relationships (i.e., community, curriculum, SBAE teachers, and school) and their association with teacher career commitment within SBAE.

Purpose and Objectives

The current study seeks to evaluate perceptions of four elements of connectivity and career commitment among a national sample of SBAE teachers as well as model the relationship between connectivity and career commitment. The knowledge gained through this work is expected to expand current understandings regarding the nature, scope, and value of connectivity within the SBAE teacher role. Furthermore, the findings from this study will illuminate the role connectivity plays in the career

commitment of SBAE teachers. The current study was guided by three research objectives: (a) describe SBAE teachers' perceptions of connectivity within the areas of community, curriculum, school, and other SBAE teachers, (b) describe SBAE teachers' perceptions of career commitment, and (c) model the relationship between SBAE teachers' perceptions of connectivity and career commitment.

Methods

The current analysis of connectivity and career commitment among SBAE teachers was completed using survey research methods. An online survey was utilized to collect data from a national sample of teachers to provide a holistic view of teacher connectivity and commitment across the United States.

Population, Sample, and Data Collection

All SBAE teachers during the 2018-2019 school year served as the population for the study (approximate $N = 13,500$). The frame for this population was managed by the National FFA Organization, which collects teacher contact information through the chapter registration process. A simple random sample of 750 teachers was obtained from the National FFA Organization. A sample of 750 was selected as a 10% response rate would still meet the minimum recommendations for a multiple linear regression with four independent (k) variables (i.e., $n > 30 + 10k$; Brooks & Barcikowski, 2012). Frame error reduced the sample by 45 respondents, resulting in a final frame of 705 teachers. Data collection, which included up to four email invitations to respond, aligned with Dillman's (2007) tailored design method and was conducted in March and April of 2019. In total, 237 responses were received; however, 24 surveys were unusable due to the scope of missing data, yielding a usable response rate of 30.21% ($n = 213$) which is consistent with response rates using the same frame (e.g., McKim, 2016; Sorensen, 2015). Non-response bias was analyzed by comparing on-time respondents (i.e., teachers responding within the first three points of contact; $n = 207$) to late-respondents (i.e., teachers responding after the final point of contact; $n = 30$) using an independent samples t -test for the four connectivity constructs and career commitment. No statistical differences were identified (p -values ranged from .381 to .778), suggesting non-response bias was not an issue (Lindner et al., 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983). Further, the demographics of respondents closely match those found in published studies with a national sample of SBAE teachers (Pauley et al., 2019; Sorensen et al., 2017), providing additional evidence of a representative sample.

Instrumentation

The current study includes five constructs of interest, (a) community connectivity, (b) curricular connectivity, (c) school connectivity, (d) SBAE teacher connectivity, and (e) career commitment. Responses for each item within the five constructs was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The researcher-developed, community connectivity construct was comprised of five questions (e.g., "I feel that I have many personal connections in the community") designed to measure connection between the teacher and the community in which their program resides. The research-developed, curricular connectivity construct was made up of seven questions (e.g., "I have full autonomy to decide what topics I teach") measuring the connection respondents had to the curriculum they taught. The researcher-developed, school connectivity construct also included seven items (e.g., "I feel connected to the teachers at my school") designed to measure connection to fellow teachers and administrators within the school in which respondents taught. The researcher-developed, SBAE teacher connectivity construct included seven items (e.g., "I feel included when I am among fellow agriculture teachers") measuring connection to peer agriculture teachers among respondents. The career commitment scale (developed by Sorensen,

2015) included eight items (e.g., “I plan to remain teaching agriculture until I am eligible to retire”) designed to measure commitment to remain as a SBAE teacher.

Validity and Reliability

A panel of experts, including four faculty in SBAE with expertise in social science research, were used to evaluate face and content validity. Feedback from the panel of experts was used to expand the content coverage of connectivity items, resulting in a more comprehensive assessment of connectivity constructs. Reliability of the five constructs was evaluated via a pilot test of 118 business teachers in Michigan. *Pilot test* reliability estimates suggested four of the five constructs were reliable (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha for community connectivity = .88, school connectivity = .90, disciplinary-peer teacher connectivity = .88, and career commitment = .87). The one construct not reliable on the pilot test was the curriculum construct (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha = .54). After consultation with the panel of experts, it was determined that differences in how business teachers and SBAE teachers relate to curriculum could have impacted the reliability of the construct; therefore, it was recommended to retain the construct within the data collection used in the current study. *Post hoc* reliability assessments suggested that each of the five constructs (i.e., Cronbach’s alpha for community connectivity = .89, curricular connectivity = .72, school connectivity = .81, SBAE teacher connectivity = .89, and career commitment = .92) were reliable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Data Analysis

The first research objective, in which perceptions of connectivity were sought, was accomplished by reverse coding appropriate items within the connectivity constructs and averaging responses to obtain a single construct score. Minimum, maximum, means and standard deviations for community, school, curricular, and SBAE teacher connectivity constructs are reported in the findings. Similarly, the second research objective, focusing on career commitment, was accomplished by reverse coding appropriate items and averaging responses to form a single career commitment score. As with connectivity scores, career commitment is reported using minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation.

For the third research objective, in which career commitment was modeled by perceptions of connectivity, a multiple linear regression was completed. To run this analysis, data were first checked for the assumptions of multiple linear regression (i.e., linearity, multivariate normality, absence of multicollinearity, homoscedasticity) with no violations found. Then, the four connectivity constructs were included in the model simultaneously as independent variables predicting career commitment, the dependent variable. Results from the model, including overall model statistics and statistics for individual predictors, are included in the findings.

Description of Respondents

Respondents to the survey were from 42 states and Puerto Rico with Texas (25), California (10), Georgia (10), and Kansas (10) being the most well-represented states. On average, respondents had 12.46 ($SD = 10.51$) years of teaching experience. The majority of respondents (75.10%) completed a traditional agriculture teacher education program (i.e., undergraduate or graduate degree in agriculture education). The largest proportion of respondents (50.80%) reported a Bachelor’s Degree as their highest level of education, followed by Master’s (47.70%), Associates (1.0%), and Ph.D. (0.50%). On average, respondents had 129.08 ($SD = 123.38$) non-duplicated students enrolled in their SBAE program during the 2018-2019 school year.

Findings

In research objective one, a description of four elements of connectivity was sought (see Table 1). The highest rated element of connectivity was within the curricular construct ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 0.82$) followed by connection to fellow SBAE teachers ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.24$) and the community in which the school was located ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.30$). The lowest perception of connectivity was identified among colleagues within the school ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.21$), which included teachers in other subject areas and administrators.

Table 1
Perceptions of Connectivity and Career Commitment

Constructs	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Curricular Connectivity	205	2.71	7.00	5.45	0.82
SBAE Teacher Connectivity	208	1.43	7.00	5.11	1.24
Community Connectivity	198	1.00	7.00	5.06	1.30
Career Commitment	211	1.00	7.00	4.61	1.52
School Connectivity	179	1.17	7.00	4.50	1.21

Note. Responses for each item within the five constructs was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Number of responses for each construct varies due to missing data.

Research objective two shifts the focus from connectivity to career commitment (also see Table 1). On average, respondents rated their career commitment a 4.61 ($SD = 1.52$), which placed the average response between the “Neither Agree nor Disagree” and “Somewhat Agree” on statements associated with career commitment.

In research objective three, the relationship between the four elements of connectivity and career commitment were modeled (see Table 2). Results indicated the model, which included community connectivity, curricular connectivity, school connectivity, and SBAE teacher connectivity as independent variables and career commitment as dependent variables, was statistically significant (F -value = 5.65; p -value < .001). In total, the four independent variables predicted 12% of the variance in career commitment ($R = .34$; $R^2 = .12$).

Table 2
Model of Career Commitment

Predictors	Dependent Variable: Career Commitment					
	Zero-order correlation (<i>r</i>)	<i>p</i> -value	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>p</i> -value
Community Connectivity	.21	.004	0.06	0.09	.06	.501
Curricular Connectivity	.20	.005	0.15	0.15	.07	.351
School Connectivity	.28	<.001	0.23	0.10	.19	.022
SBAE Teacher Connectivity	.24	<.001	0.19	0.09	.16	.046

Note. $R = .34$, $R^2 = .12$, F -value = 5.65, p -value = <.001. Items scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Within the final model, two of the predictors were statistically significant. The strongest predictor of career commitment was school connectivity ($\beta = .19$; p -value = .022) followed by SBAE teacher connectivity ($\beta = .16$; p -value = .046). Both community connectivity ($\beta = .06$; p -value = .501) and curricular connectivity ($\beta = .07$; p -value = .351) were statistically insignificant predictors of career commitment.

Discussion and Conclusions

The essential nature of connections to life as an SBAE teacher encourages explorations into the influence of connections on teacher career commitment. As an exploratory investigation, four elements of connectivity were considered, including school, SBAE teacher, curricular, and community connectivity in relation to career commitment. The findings of this study highlight the importance of connectivity to the career commitment of SBAE teachers. Findings support the theoretical framework for this study, the Relational Theory of Working (Blustein, 2011), as well as related studies on high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), suggesting connections and relationships are critical variables needing consideration in efforts to study and/or support SBAE teacher career commitment.

Some limitations were identified in this study while analyzing data. This study used self-perceived responses and the perceptions of respondents regarding their career commitment. Data could be more generalizable and supported by conducting a longitudinal analysis of the career decisions of SBAE teachers. Additionally, one could argue other areas of connectivity could have been evaluated (e.g., connections to students, FFA) that would provide a more comprehensive analysis of connectivity among SBAE teachers. While these are certainly limitations of the current study, they are also opportunities for future research on this important topic. Acknowledging the identified limitations, the findings from the current study are discussed henceforth.

School connectivity was found to be the strongest predictor of career commitment; however, respondents felt the least connected in this area. The importance of connections within a school district is supported by the theoretical framework, which identified relationships in the workplace as essential (Jordan, 2008). The lower perceived connectedness between SBAE teachers and other school employees should yield concern as numerous educational studies have identified that lack of connections within a school district increases teacher turnover (Hong, 2010; Hope, 1999; Rinke, 2007; Sass, et al. 2011). A lack of connectedness can create feelings of isolation within the teacher's own school district, which can lead to a relational gap between teachers and administrators (Sass et al., 2011). Weak peer and administrative support have been found to have a large influence on the decision of teachers to leave the profession as it decreases school culture and perceived emotional support

(Hong, 2010; Hope, 1999; Sass et al., 2011). A study by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found feelings of isolation and relational gaps between administrators and teachers within a school district accounted for nearly one-third of teacher dissatisfaction with their career.

In addition to school connectivity, connections with other SBAE teachers was found to be a significant predictor of career commitment. Conversely to school connectivity, respondents reported having a relatively strong connection with other SBAE teachers. The findings support existing research in SBAE suggesting social relationships and connections with other SBAE teachers increase career commitment, with self-efficacy acting as a mediating variable (Korte & Simonsen, 2018). Importantly, however, the high average SBAE teacher connectivity perceived among respondents does not mean all respondents felt connected to their SBAE teaching peers. In fact, 22.10% of respondents rated their average SBAE teacher connectivity a four (out of seven) or lower. This “deeper dive” into the data suggests while many teachers felt connected, there are certainly SBAE teachers who lack connections among their SBAE teaching peers, potentially contributing to the teacher shortage.

In total, the findings both support and add to the Relational Theory of Working. The theory suggests connections within the workplace are essential to satisfaction, resilience, and overcoming obstacles (Blustein, 2011; Jordan, 2008). The statistically significant model of connectivity and career commitment adds evidence supporting the relationships posited within the theory. In addition, the current study expands the reach of the Relational Theory of Working into SBAE literature. However, the most important contribution to the theory might be the operationalization of multiple facets of connectivity. By expanding connectivity beyond a single concept (i.e., relationship with workplace colleagues) to include community, curriculum, and fellow SBAE teachers, this study offers an exciting new approach for scholars using the Relational Theory of Working. Research in other areas (e.g., other content area teachers, nurses, computer scientists) may benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of employee connectedness to include areas of their work beyond connections to workplace colleagues.

Recommendations

As the lowest rated element of connectivity and strongest predictor of career commitment, there is a clear need to help SBAE teachers develop connections within their schools. Educational research has identified ways to increase the connections and support teachers experience within their school through mentoring programs and interdisciplinary lesson planning (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring programs allow for novice teachers to gain confidence in their teaching abilities and connect with other teachers by providing a mentor to help guide and support their work in the classroom (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teacher mentoring programs have been found to simultaneously increase novice teacher performance in the classroom and intentions to remain in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These mentoring programs allow for novice teachers to gain confidence in their teaching abilities and connect with other teachers by providing an in-school mentor to help guide and support their work (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Interdisciplinary lesson planning, in which an SBAE teacher works with other academic area teachers to develop and/or teach a lesson, is another opportunity to forge connections within the school. Through participating in interdisciplinary lesson planning, SBAE teachers build relationships with other content area teachers in their school district in hopes of improving their perceived emotional support and school culture (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014).

SBAE teacher connections were also found to be statistically significant in the prediction of career commitment; therefore, authors recommend new and beginning teachers be given an onboarding experience focused on SBAE cultural awareness and targeted relationship building. The Relational Theory of Working identified having cultural awareness of the workplace and targeted relationship

building as the starting points for strong relationships (Jordan, 2008). An onboarding experience focused on SBAE cultural awareness would seek to introduce new and beginning teachers to district, state, regional, and national norms and unwritten rules of teaching SBAE. Topics could include common attire during professional development experiences, teacher roles during leadership contests, expected attendance at unscheduled social gatherings, and a variety of other norms. Targeted relationship building among new and beginning teachers should focus on fostering mutual empathy and empowerment among participants, which the theoretical framework identifies as the two characteristics of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2008).

Research modeling mentoring participation, interdisciplinary collaborations, and career commitment is needed as a next step to inform interventions attending to the connectedness and career commitment of SBAE teachers. Although the averages found for each construct were relatively high, the findings of this study suggest there are outliers who are not feeling as connected as others in the SBAE community. Future research is needed to identify factors that impact connectivity in SBAE, as well as identify how sub-populations (e.g., alternatively certified teachers, novice teachers, etc.) vary in their levels of connectivity.

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