

## **The Balancing Act: Exploring Scholarship for the Agricultural Leadership Educator**

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### **Introduction**

Today's leadership educator is housed in a variety of departments across our colleges and universities. As a result, leadership coursework is taught contextually based in multiple disciplines including, but not limited to, business, education, military studies, student affairs, and agriculture (Pennington, 2005). Within colleges of agriculture, leadership offerings include not only coursework, but also minors, majors, and certificate programs (Brown & Fritz, 1994, Fritz & Brown, 1998, Fritz, Townsend, Hoover, Weeks, Carter, & Nietfeldt, 2003, Pennington, 2005, Pennington & Weeks, 2006). A few academic leadership programs in agriculture have enrollments large enough to employ leadership educators devoted solely to the purpose of teaching and studying leadership. However, it is common for leadership educators teaching in the context of agriculture to be academically prepared as agricultural (teacher or extension) educators and then later assigned to teach agricultural leadership. Typically, leadership educators in agricultural departments are agricultural educators, first, and leadership educators, second (Fritz & Brown, 1998, Pennington Weeks, Weeks, Barbuto, & Langone, 2009). For the purposes of this paper, leadership educators teaching within the context of agriculture will be referred to as agricultural leadership educators.

Generally, agricultural leadership educators are professionally aligned with both the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) and the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE). In light of this dual alignment, exploring the National Research Agenda of Agricultural Education and Communication (Doerfert, 2011), as it relates to the newly announced National

Leadership Education Research Agenda (Andenoro, Allen, Haber-Curran, Jenkins, Sowcik, Dugan, & Osteen, 2013) is of utmost importance. In addition to examining the relationship between the two research agendas, one a publication of AAAE and the other a publication of ALE, this paper will define agricultural leadership and provide the reader background information as it relates to the history and development of agricultural leadership as an academic area of study. Finally, recommendations related to scholarship will be offered for the agricultural leadership educator as he/she attempts to balance the paths of two different disciplines: agricultural education and leadership.

### **The Nature of Agricultural Leadership**

Agricultural leadership is the study of leadership applied to the agricultural context. In many ways, agricultural leadership is not unlike leadership education and studies in various disciplines across college campuses. Agricultural leadership scholars, like other leadership scholars, are interested in the foundational principles and theories of leadership. The difference between leadership studies and agricultural leadership studies lies in the application of leadership to specific agricultural settings and issues. Agricultural leadership scholars examine leadership as it applies to the agricultural context. More specifically, agricultural leadership explores leadership within agricultural settings such as formal and non-formal agricultural education settings, agricultural industry and non-profit organizations, rural communities, youth organizations such as Future Farmers of America (FFA) and the 4-H youth development organization (4-H), and various agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), including the Cooperative Extension Service. Additionally, agricultural leadership scholars and educators are interested in leadership as it relates to critical issues in agriculture, including the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's priority areas: climate change, global food security and hunger, sustainable energy, food safety, and childhood obesity.

Historically, agricultural leadership programs grew out of programs in agricultural education and, today, agricultural leadership coursework, majors, and minors continue to be housed in departments of agricultural education. As an area of academic study, agricultural leadership is relatively new, although its roots can be traced to the early 1900s as agricultural educators began preparing advisors of youth leadership organizations (Fritz, et al. 2003). To understand agricultural leadership, it is important to first understand the nature, history and development of agricultural education. Agricultural education can be defined as "the scientific study of the principles and methods of teaching and learning as they pertain to agriculture" (Barrick, 1989, p. 26). The growth of agricultural education as a discipline was fueled by federal legislation. Of primary importance are the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 that established land-grant colleges, as well as the Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes Acts (Talbert, Vaughn, Croom, & Lee, 2014). The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Cooperative Extension Service and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 established support for secondary vocational education, more specifically funding for secondary vocational agriculture programs (Talbert, et al., 2014).

Traditionally, departments of agricultural education were responsible for preparing future teachers of secondary vocational agriculture. In 1938, Dr. Glen C. Cook, a vocational agricultural educator, proposed a four-component model for agricultural education. Major concepts of the model were (1) classroom instruction, (2) supervised farm practice, (3) farm mechanics, and (4) extracurricular activities including FFA and 4-H (Talbert, et al., 2014). Cook's model, through the fourth component—extracurricular activities-- served as the first model to include leadership development as a function of agricultural educators. Subsequent revisions of Cook's model have resulted in a three-component model, known as the three-circle model. The three-circle model includes classroom instruction, supervised experience, and extracurricular activities defined as FFA (Talbert, et al., 2014).

In 1993, the three-circle model for agricultural education was re-conceptualized by Hughes and Barrick (Talbert, et al., 2014). The first component of the updated model was classroom and laboratory instruction, which focused on “technical agriculture, leadership and personal development” (Hughes & Barrick, 1993, p. 59). The first component recognized that agricultural educators taught leadership not only through extracurricular activities such as FFA, but also through formal classroom instruction. Additional major components were (1) application which included FFA and supervised experiences, (2) employment and/or additional education, and (3) career. In order to prepare future teachers of secondary vocational agriculture, the practice of teaching leadership and personal development within colleges' departments of agricultural education became increasingly more common.

Further spurring the focus on leadership within agricultural education were various agricultural education scholars formally discussing the nature of agricultural education, threats to the profession, and opportunities for growth (Barrick, 1989, Barrick, 1993, Goeker, 1992, McCormick, 1983, Newcomb, 1993, Shinn & Creek, 1981, Williams, 1991). Although the sole purpose of many departments of agricultural education was, and in some cases still is, to prepare future teachers of agriculture at the secondary level (Newcomb, 1993), many of the leading scholars began exploring opportunities for growth. Naturally, one of these areas of opportunity was leadership education.

At the same time that the model for agricultural education was being updated by Hughes and Barrick (1993), a national study was conducted examining leadership offerings in departments of agricultural education. Brown and Fritz (1994) found that more than half of agricultural education departments were offering courses in leadership and leadership development. Similar results were found in a follow-up study in which Fritz and Brown (1998) reported, “departments of agricultural education are becoming increasingly involved in development and delivery of leadership education courses and outreach” (p. 57). In addition to formally examining to what extent leadership was being taught in departments of agricultural education, the authors concluded that in moving the study of agricultural leadership forward that of utmost importance was the creation of scholarship by agricultural leadership educators if they were to establish credibility outside the discipline of agricultural education.

Departments of agricultural education, which seek to disseminate knowledge about leadership, must simultaneously be in the business of creating it. If agricultural education based leadership development programs are to have credibility with other academic disciplines, the most certain way to demonstrate it will be through programs of sound scholarship (Fritz & Brown, 1998, p. 62)

### **Creating Credibility through Focused Scholarship**

Since its inception, agricultural leadership has had to validate its connection and place within the context of agriculture education. There have been two significant events which have lead to the development of the scholarship of agricultural leadership. The first was a national Agricultural Leadership Education Summit and the second was the development of a special interest group for agricultural leadership within AAAE. Both events took place in 2004. At the 2004 National Agricultural Leadership Education Summit, practicing agricultural leadership scholars sought to set forth a common and consistent philosophy of leadership and created a mission statement for agricultural leadership educators: “to discover, teach, and disseminate leadership theory, principles, and practices in the agricultural and life sciences contexts to develop leadership for organizations, businesses, governmental agencies, and communities” (Townsend & Fritz, 2007). The mission statement provided a framework for agricultural leadership scholars to focus on essential issues necessary for agricultural leaders to create change. Action items created at the Summit further validated the types of activities that would accomplish this mission; for example, setting national standards, developing a conceptual framework, increasing quality and amount of scholarship and collaboration, strengthening the community of scholars, and identifying research priorities.

The second event impacting agricultural leadership scholarship was an initiative developed at the national level with the American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) to develop special interest groups (SIG). As a result, the Agricultural Leadership Education SIG was created to promote collaboration and provide further connection among agricultural leadership scholars (Townsend & Fritz, 2007). The Agricultural Leadership SIG has met annually during the national research meeting of AAAE since its creation in 2004.

In the broadest scope, agricultural education represents a number of specialized fields, all with the specific interest of educating the public about agriculture. These specializations include teacher preparation, agricultural communication and journalism, extension education, international agricultural development, and agricultural leadership. Agricultural education is organized through the AAAE which promotes the mission, “... dedicated to studying, applying, and promoting the teaching and learning process in agriculture” (AAAE, 2013). Specific goals of AAAE include advocacy, issues forum in agricultural education, prioritizing research in teaching and learning, individual and organizational growth and renewal, promoting

communication of scholarship, collaboration within and outside AAAE, and recruitment for the profession (AAAE, 2013). Because of this diverse set of specialized fields, agricultural educators have had to discuss the complex set of issues which may be addressed through this unique lens. Since 2007, the field of agricultural education has sought to establish a unified agenda of research priorities, with the second iteration published in 2011 (Osborne, 2007; Doerfert, 2011). These documents have provided guidance and a framework by which research efforts are organized, reviewed, and published. For those agricultural leadership educators it is the document that stipulates how we communicate about research.

So, the question becomes with the publication of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda, how can agricultural leadership educators find a common ground among the two? The position of this piece is to provide a framework by which agricultural leadership educators can value the complementary nature of both the National Research Agenda of Agricultural Education and Communication (NRAAEC) and the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA). A comparison of the two documents to elicit similarities and differences is provided, as well as a brief commentary on research projects that may emerge from the identified similarities. Further, the National Leadership Education Research Agenda will be contextualized within agricultural leadership education to highlight how it may be applied to specific agricultural leadership stakeholder groups.

### **Building Bridges between Disciplines**

As stated previously, the question for agricultural leadership educators is how to balance the priorities of the National Leadership Research Agenda and the National Agricultural Research Agenda. In order to facilitate this process, agricultural educators must see the commonalities and connectedness between the two. This first section outlines the following: a) a short summary of the National Agricultural Research Agenda (Doerfert, 2011), b) descriptions of connections between the two agendas, and c) areas of opportunity to pursue research applicable to both agendas.

#### **The National Agricultural Research Agenda**

The first National Agricultural Research Agenda (Osborne, 2007) set forth the practice that agricultural education should in fact have a document, which guides and stimulates the research process within the discipline. Since that time great effort has been made to utilize the document to frame research conducted, presented, and published. The second iteration continues that tradition by promoting research collaboration and scholarship in six focused key priority areas.

Each priority is presented with key outcome(s), background, challenges, and opportunities aligning with the framework for the National Leadership Education Research Agenda. Priority 1 is “Public and Policy Maker Understanding of Agriculture and Natural Resources” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 8). The aligning key outcome is, “Consumers and policy makers will have an accurate understanding of and informed opinions about agriculture and natural resources. Further, policy

decisions at all levels will reflect win-win solutions that ensure the long-term sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life in communities across the nation” (p. 11). The basis for this priority is the recognition that fewer and fewer people are directly involved with agriculture, creating gaps in knowledge of and support for agriculture and natural resource issues.

Priority 2 is “New technologies, practices and products” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 8). Its associated key outcome is, “Agriculturalists, rural landowners, homeowners, and consumers will embrace new technologies, practices, and products derived through agricultural and natural resource research (p. 15). This priority is grounded in the notion that a strong agricultural system requires technological practices, which promote better practices for growing, producing, and dissemination of agricultural products. However, these all must have realized positive impacts across the economy, environment and society (Doerfert, 2011). Priority 3 focuses on “Sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 9). The key outcome is identified as “A sufficient supply of well-prepared agricultural scientists and professionals drive sustainable growth, scientific discovery, and innovation in public, private, and academic settings” (p. 18). The intent of priority three is developing the capacity and capabilities of the workforce to address complex problems and opportunities (Doerfert, 2011).

Priority 4 promotes “Meaningful, engaged, learning in all environments” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 9). The key outcome for priority four is that, “Learners in all agricultural education learning environments will be actively and emotionally engaged in learning, leading to high levels of achievement, life and career readiness, and professional success” (p. 21). As one can imagine, the underpinnings of agricultural education are in the associated processes of teaching and learning; however, as the landscape of education changes so must these practices. This includes the technology, but also the learners who are more diverse in cultural and socioeconomic background than ever before (Doerfert, 2011). Similarly, Priority 5 seeks, “Efficient and effective agricultural education programs” (p. 10). Priority five carries two key outcomes, the first being that “Highly effective educational programs will meet the academic, career, and developmental needs of diverse learners in all settings and at all levels” (p. 24) and the second, that “Accurate and reliable data that describe the quality and impact of educational programs and outreach efforts at all levels will be distributed to respective decision groups (e.g. students, parents, administrators, industry, policy makers” (p. 24). In times of competition among schools and programs for both youth and adults it is imperative to offer quality programs and communicate that impact to audiences (Doerfert, 2011).

Priority 6 brings focus to, “Vibrant, Resilient Communities” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 11). The key outcome for this priority is, “Local communities will have effective leaders and engaged citizens who ensure high quality educational and career development opportunities for youth adults and proactively sustain an environment conducive to positive community change” (p. 27). This last priority brings recognition to the connection between the vitality of communities and the people

of those communities. It addresses promoting communities, which are capable of dealing with complex challenges through engaged citizens (Doerfert, 2011).

### **Two Research Agendas: Connecting Leadership and Agricultural Education**

In scope the manner in which the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) and the National Agricultural Education Research Agenda (NAERA) address key research priorities varies. While presented in a very similar manner, the NLERA focuses on issues with direct connections to the success of leadership education as a discipline with opportunities that reflect the broader application and the NAERA presents broader issues with more opportunities that are discipline-specific. Yet, they both provide complementary perspectives for research.

The first and most clear connection relates Area 1: Pedagogical priorities, Priority 1: Teaching, learning and curriculum development of the NLERA (Andenoro, Allen, Haber-Curran, Jenkins, Sowcik, Dugan, and Osteen, 2013) and Priority 4: Meaningful, engaged learning in all environments of the NAERA (Doerfert, 2011). Both of these strive to address the process of teaching and learning. There are connections between the two in the desire to know more about today's learner. Each addresses capacity development, diverse perspectives, and personal attributes which contribute to the learning process (i.e. motivation). Second is the need to address advances in the teaching process whether that be through delivery technologies, high impact teaching strategies, or engaging learning experiences (i.e. online or distance delivery).

Again, within Area 1: Pedagogical priorities of the NLERA is Priority 2: Programmatic assessment and evaluation (Andenoro et al., 2013). This aligns with Priority 5 of the NAERA, Efficient and effective agricultural education programs. Both research agendas address the need to further establish strong evaluation methods to document impact. This message is clear in the NLERA with applied outcomes identifying standards and assessment explicitly. In the second key outcome of the NAERA, the need to evaluate is punctuated by the need to collect, "accurate and reliable data" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 24). In the NLERA it is clear that there is a need to document what kinds of programs exist, whom they are appropriate for, and the established outcomes. Within the NAERA key outcome one touches on this by clarifying that educational programs must meet a wide variety of learner needs in all settings.

Priority six of Area 2 within the NLERA focuses on "Social Change and Community Development" (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 22) which connects to Priority 6: Vibrant, resilient communities (Doerfert, 2011). This priority of the NLERA brings attention to two issues, social change and community development. Addressing the scope of communities, both agendas focus on the complexity of issues facing communities across the United States. Specifically, the NLERA identifies concerns including, "globalization, the economic downturn, competing priorities, climate change, and the rapid expansion of technology..." (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 22). The NEARA's key outcome brings attention to the role effective leaders, along with engaged citizens, can have on community sustainability and resilience. By identifying the role of

community leaders in this priority, the NLERA has a natural place in complementing efforts in the agricultural education field.

Within the NLERA there are two priorities which cannot operate independently to be ultimately successful: Area 2, Priority 3: The psychological development of leaders, followers, and learners, and Priority 4: The sociological development of leaders, followers, and learners. These two together complement Priority 3 of the NEARA to have a “Sufficient scientific and professional workforce that addresses the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 9). The primary connection is situated in the idea that a well-prepared workforce starts with the individual and develops into organizations. Specifically, “Without a focus on the development of effective human capital as a life-long process, we will fail in addressing the societal challenges that lie before us” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 19). The idea of human capital is grounded in the psychological and sociological development of the individual. To approach understanding what people need to develop, as leaders, there must be an awareness of the human psyche. Priority three of the NLERA provides the foundation for why leaders must, “...develop perspective for self within the group and organizational context” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 13). Included within this is the development of critical and creative thinking, as well as other dimensions of self like, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, motivation, hardiness, etc. Further, Priority four supports the transition from a purely individualistic focus to one of the social being. This allows for the development of learning organizations, which are necessary to create knowledge, respond to innovation, and cope with change. Because the nature of agriculture is changing rapidly, the need to have a responsive and adaptive workforce is equally important to success.

Another unique connection is the need to develop new technologies, practices, and products adoption decisions, as seen in the NAERA, Priority 2 (Doerfert, 2011) and priorities three and four of the NLERA, but also with Priority 5: Influences of social identity (Andenoro et al., 2013). The idea of social identity allows for examination of differences among leaders and followers and its impact on outcomes. This complements the desire for identification of how the idea of social identity influences adoption behaviors, including communication and educational efforts to influence such behaviors.

### **Opportunities: Emergent Research Themes**

There are a variety of research studies which could address both the NLERA and the NAERA, as alluded to in the established connections. Research themes are organized in the same manner in which the connections are established. These lists are in no way meant to be exhaustive, but are simply representative of research studies which align with both agendas.

*Teaching and Learning Themes:* The need to understand the complexities of the teaching and learning process is essential to both agendas. The following research recommendations are ideas derived from both agendas.



- How do leaders learn? What are the teaching and learning processes which complement unique needs of leaders within the agriculture and natural resource context?
- What delivery strategies are most effective when teaching leadership at a variety of levels (Youth/FFA/4-H, Adults)?
- How are specific leadership behaviors and skills best taught to leaders within the agriculture and natural resource context?
- In what ways will online instruction impact leadership instruction in colleges of agriculture?
- What opportunities exist within higher education for colleges of agriculture to partner with other leadership development providers?
- How can we best ensure that diverse perspectives are addressed in leadership development programs in colleges of agriculture?
- How can study abroad experiences impact students' capacity for learning to be leaders?

*Evaluation of Programs Themes:* How we document programmatic impact is important to the long-term credibility of leadership programs. The following research recommendations are ideas derived from both agendas.

- To what extent are leadership programs within agriculture and natural resources documenting desired program objectives/outcomes and collecting necessary data?
- What are the perceptions of credibility among leadership development programs of those within agriculture and natural resources?
- What is the breadth of program objectives of adult leadership development programs within agriculture and natural resources?
- How can we ensure that leadership program administrators are comfortable in evaluation and assessment methods, including data collection and analysis procedures?
- What are the established best practices for leadership development programs in agriculture and natural resources?

*Community Leadership and Change Themes:* Understanding how leadership can make a continued impact through communities by focusing resiliency and social change is valuable. The following research recommendations are ideas derived from both agendas.

- How can capacity for resilience be established in rural communities?
- What leadership development opportunities are necessary to address leadership succession in rural communities?
- In what ways are agricultural communities prepared for global competition and complex issues related to diversity?
- How can local community leaders be prepared to discuss complex issues related to agriculture and natural resources?
- What role can and do youth have in promoting positive community change initiatives?

*Our Leaders:* Knowing who our leaders are and how they operate within a social setting is imperative for the future of agriculture and natural resources. The following research recommendations are ideas derived from both agendas.

- What makes leaders within agriculture and natural resources different in terms of their leadership development needs?
- How does motivation play a role in the desire of leaders to address local issues related to agriculture and natural resources?
- What are the most effective ways to develop the capacity for leadership in youth and adults?
- How does leadership efficacy impact an individual's desire to lead within agriculture and natural resources?
- In what ways can leaders play a role in securing the future of organizations within agriculture and natural resources?

*Change and Innovation:* Agriculture and natural resources have always been faced with the need to be responsive to change. The following research recommendations are ideas derived from both agendas.

- How can entrepreneurship secure a future for the agriculture and natural resources industries?
- What changes and innovations will be necessary to address the complex issues related to food needs in the U.S. and across the globe in the next 50 years?
- In what ways do culture and diversity impact the innovation adoption-decision process?
- What leadership development needs are there to help individuals, organizations, and communities address changes within agriculture and natural resources?

In closing, it is important to credit each organization with supporting the research that addresses real problems with real solutions. It is hoped that this manuscript provides the catalyst for dialogue among agricultural leadership educators not to see two competing agendas, but to see two complementary and valuable agendas framing research in a significant way. As the sub-discipline of agricultural leadership education moves forward, documenting its contribution to leadership education and agricultural education will solidify its integral seat at the proverbial table.

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Dr. Penny Pennington Weeks joined the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership at Oklahoma State University in 2001 with an academic background in leadership theory, leadership education, and the behavioral sciences. She completed her doctoral program in the Department of Agricultural Education at Texas A&M University, which houses the largest undergraduate agricultural leadership program in the United States. Since coming to OSU, Dr. Pennington Weeks has created a minor in Leadership Education and a major in Agricultural Leadership for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate leadership courses contextually based in agriculture, including leadership theory, personal leadership development, and facilitation of leadership education programs. Dr. Pennington Weeks has served as the President of the *Association of Leadership Educators* and as the project director of two USDA funded projects: *The Leadership Education Institute for Faculty in Colleges of Agriculture* and *NIFA Priority Areas: Drivers for Contextually Based Curriculum in Agricultural Leadership*.