

Contested Curriculum: Evaluating CDE Use in Agricultural Education Coursework

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Introduction, Need for Research, and Research Objective

Many school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs use the three-component model of instruction, which serves as the basis for program planning (Croom, 2008). Using this model, FFA is presented as an intra-curricular activity where students apply what they have learned in the classroom to develop career and leadership skills through, among other activities, Career Development Events (CDEs) (Croom, 2008; Jenkins & Kitchel, 2009). Because FFA is presented in this way, anecdotal evidence suggests many SBAE programs include FFA within their coursework. Currently, however, there is little empirical research exploring the incorporation of CDEs in classroom curriculum. Therefore, the current research aims to quantify this largely unexplored area by exploring trends between three teacher demographic characteristics and level of CDE use in classroom instruction.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the current study is the three-component model of agricultural education (Croom, 2008). The model identifies classroom/laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural experiences, and leadership/FFA as the three elements of a comprehensive program. In addition, the model suggests overlap between each component, representing the need for experiences which combine two or more model components (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). This framework provides a foundation for the current study, which explores the overlap between classroom/laboratory instruction and leadership/FFA by analyzing the utilization of CDEs within instructional curriculum.

Methodology

A census of Michigan teachers ($N = 127$) was conducted during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 school year. A total of 92 useable responses were received, resulting in a 72% response rate ($n = 92$). Data were collected as part of a larger research project. The data of interest in the current proposal include responses on the CDE and curriculum spectrum (CDECS) and demographic questions. The CDECS is a four-question, author-developed construct in which respondents rate their agreement from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 100 (*strongly agree*) on items measuring the utilization of CDEs within their curriculum (e.g., "I conduct a replication of the CDEs for students to complete during classroom instruction"). Responses indicate the average alignment of curriculum and CDEs from 0 (*completely unaligned*) to 100 (*completely aligned*). Demographic questions included years of teaching experience, teacher certification, and level of education. Prior to data collection, the CDECS was pilot tested with agricultural education teachers in Ohio with results indicating the CDECS was reliable (Cronbach's Alpha = .72; Warmbrod, 2014). Additionally, face and content validity were evaluated by a panel of experts in SBAE. Data were analyzed and reported by comparing the means and standard deviations by categorical groupings of three demographic variables.

Findings

In comparing teacher characteristics and CDECS, years of teaching experience, certification type, and level of education were considered (see Table 1). Respondents with the least amount of teaching experience reported the highest CDECS ($M = 74.09$) followed by the most experienced teachers ($M = 71.93$), with mid-career teachers reporting the lowest CDECS ($M = 67.74$). In

comparing teacher certification, those with alternative certification reported a higher CDECS ($M = 74.49$) than their traditionally certified peers ($M = 68.97$). With regard to education level, those who indicated a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education reported the highest CDECS ($M = 82.17$) followed by those indicating completion of a graduate degree ($M = 69.50$). Teachers indicating "some graduate work" reported the lowest CDECS ($M = 65.23$).

Table 1

Teacher Demographics and CDECS

	<i>f</i>	Mean	SD
Teaching Experience			
0-5 Years of Experience	23	74.09	18.03
6-19 Years of Experience	36	67.74	22.30
20+ Years of Experience	18	71.93	22.98
Teacher Certification			
Traditional Teacher Certification	54	68.97	21.98
Alternative Teacher Certification	23	74.49	19.14
Level of Education			
Bachelor's Degree	11	82.17	23.18
Some Graduate Work	15	65.23	18.98
Masters and/or PhD	50	69.50	21.03

Note. CDECS indicates alignment of curriculum and CDEs and ranges from 0 "completely unaligned" to 100 "completely aligned."

Conclusions

Findings suggest (a) early-career teachers, (b) alternatively-certified teachers, and (c) teachers with an undergraduate degree as their highest level of education are using CDEs in classroom instruction the most. Importantly, however, CDEs appear to be used largely across all teachers included in the study. Results support the conceptual framework, showing overlap between classroom instruction and the FFA (Croom, 2008).

Implications, Recommendations, and Impact on Profession

CDEs appear to be more prevalent in the curriculum of teachers who have less experience. One can reason that experienced teachers have more pedagogical knowledge and curriculum development experience through additional coursework and years of teaching. Therefore, the current research suggests CDEs are an easily accessible and implementable curriculum resource for teachers, making CDE inclusion more appealing to less experienced teachers.

The dearth of existing research exploring the overlap between CDEs and classroom instruction belies the need for future research and professional debate identifying the ideal instructional alignment between CDEs and SBAE curriculum. Additionally, once there is consensus on the ideal alignment between CDEs and classroom instruction, teacher educators should work to provide additional resources to achieve this alignment. This could be through curriculum development resources, professional development, and/or instructional resources for CDEs.

References

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