

Competition, Student Development, or Classroom Extension: Exploring CDE Philosophies

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Introduction

As the belief systems held by teachers shape their interactions with students (Buehl & Beck, 2015) an awareness of the philosophical orientation of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers is crucial in exploring the objectives of learning opportunities provided to students. Career development events (CDEs) present copious opportunities for student learning and growth in SBAE; however, a lack of literature describing the philosophies held by SBAE teachers regarding CDEs limits opportunities to support instruction and continued student success through CDE contexts. Therefore, the current study, guided by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), sought to describe the philosophies of CDEs held by Michigan SBAE teachers.

Though no tools currently exist to measure SBAE educator philosophies of CDEs, a review of current literature identified nine reoccurring outcomes associated with CDE participation (Ball, Bowling, & Bird, 2016; Russell, Robinson, & Kelsey, 2009). Synthesis of the outcomes reveals three main outcome themes, operationalized in the current study as three general philosophies of CDEs. The themes, and their associated outcomes, include a) classroom extension (i.e., apply classroom learning, assess student proficiency, and provide a context for learning), b) competition and achievement (i.e., build/maintain a reputation of success, compete and/or win, and provide student recognition), and c) student development (i.e., develop career-specific knowledge, develop career-specific skills, develop leadership and life skills).

Methods

A census of the target population, SBAE teachers in Michigan during the 2017-2018 school year ($N = 131$), was attempted by retrieving the Michigan AFNR frame from the State Supervisor for AFNR education. Due to frame error, potential respondents were limited to 127. Using the online survey tool Qualtrics, surveys were administered (Dillman, 2007) and 92 completed surveys were submitted for a response rate of 72 percent. Non-response bias was rejected through a comparison of responses by on-time and late respondents and by comparing respondent demographics against the target population (Linder, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). Data collected are part of a larger research project.

In the survey instrument, respondents were asked to rank the nine outcomes of CDE participation, identified above, from 1 (most important) to 9 (least important). Though each outcome of CDE participation was aligned to a general philosophy of CDEs prior to data collection, respondents were asked to rank the outcomes of CDEs to limit the possibility of response bias related to respondents self-selecting the philosophy. To determine each respondent's philosophy of CDEs from his or her outcome rankings, rank scoring was used. First, the rank of CDE outcomes associated with each general philosophy of CDEs was summated. The philosophy category which received the lowest summated score (i.e., highest original rank) was recorded as the respondent's general philosophy of CDEs. Tied scores were

broken by recording the philosophy category associated with the top ranked outcome item as the respondent's general philosophy of CDEs. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the mean ranks of outcome items and the distribution of each philosophy of CDEs among the sample.

Findings

In addition to the identification of mean rankings of CDE outcomes (see Table 1), analysis of Michigan SBAE educators' general philosophy of CDEs indicates most teachers align with the philosophy of student development ($f = 58$; 63.0%). The classroom extension philosophy ($f = 30$; 32.6%) was the second most frequent philosophy among SBAE educators, while the least held philosophy was competition and achievement ($f = 4$; 4.3%).

Table 1

Michigan AFNR Educators' Ranking of CDE Outcomes

	<i>f</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Classroom Extension					
Apply classroom learning.	92	3.14	1.90	1	9
Provide a context for learning.	92	3.96	2.00	1	9
Assess student proficiency.	92	5.84	1.97	1	9
Competition and Achievement					
Provide student recognition.	92	6.90	1.69	2	9
Build/maintain a reputation of success.	92	7.18	1.87	1	9
Compete and/or win.	92	7.66	1.87	1	9
Student Development					
Develop leadership and life skills.	92	3.21	2.15	1	8
Develop career-specific skills.	92	3.47	1.69	1	8
Develop career-specific knowledge.	92	3.64	1.85	1	9

Note. Values represent ranked items from 1 (*most important*) to 9 (*least important*); therefore, lower means indicate higher ranked, more important, outcomes.

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

While findings indicate Michigan AFNR educators value the application of classroom learning as the most important outcome of CDEs, a majority of responding Michigan SBAE educators held a student development philosophy of CDEs, more consistently ranking outcomes associated with the development of leadership, life, and career-specific knowledge and skills as more important CDE outcomes. The philosophy of CDEs held by the fewest Michigan SBAE educators was competition and achievement, indicating outcomes such as competition and winning, developing a reputation of success, and providing student recognition were not as important to teachers as opportunities for student development or classroom extension.

As individuals and organizations within SBAE seek to strengthen student learning opportunities through CDEs, it is crucial to consider the philosophies which guide SBAE teachers' actions. As the majority of SBAE teachers in Michigan hold a CDE philosophy of student development, Michigan CDE coordinators should identify opportunities to enhance

student development through CDEs, such as increasing CDE components which test students' high-order cognition.

While knowledge of SBAE teachers' philosophies of CDEs provides opportunities for more intentional support from outside staff, it is also valuable for SBAE teachers themselves to engage in self-reflection of their own philosophy of CDEs to ensure the instruction and preparation strategies they use match their desired student outcomes.

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