

DIVERSIFYING THE APPROACH

PERCEPTIONS OF BOOK CIRCLES AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

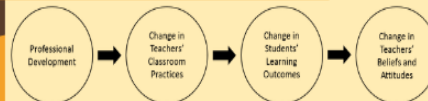
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Introduction

Goal one of the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) (2017) strategic plan asks members of the association to “reflect the broader discipline and provide a coordinated response to social science issues affecting agriculture and related sciences” (p. 1) with respect to building a more inclusive culture. Given current events relating to inequities of underrepresented groups, conversations and action surrounding the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are of relevance and importance to society, including the field of school-based agricultural education (SBAE). The challenge of educational inequity is tied to the differences between teachers and students (Howard, 2010). Efforts to promote education equity via professional development focused on DEI within SBAE are challenging as perceptions of SBAE teachers vary greatly concerning the benefits of DEI (Lavergne et al., 2012).

To approach the topic of DEI in the professional development of SBAE teachers, the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA) implemented a summer book circle focused on a DEI title. Book circles are shown to be more effective than traditional professional development (e.g., conferences, lectures) as participants are actively involved (Blanton et al., 2019). This active engagement includes collaboration, community building, opportunity to interact, and lifelong learning not limited to the professional development event itself (Blanton et al., 2019). Still, there is little research in terms of using book circles to develop teachers (Blanton et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of SBAE teachers after participating in a DEI professional development event organized as a book circle.

Theoretical Framework



Guskey's (2000) model of teacher change describing the end result of effective professional development as a change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

Guskey's (2002) Stages for Evaluating Teacher Professional Development

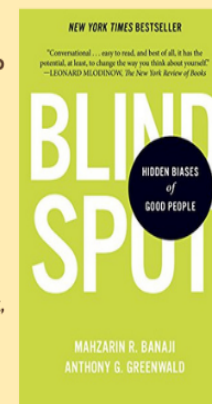
Level	Implication
1) Participants' Reactions	Helps to improve the design and delivery of programs.
2) Participants' Learning	Verifies relationship between what was intended versus achieved.
3) Organization Support and Change	Explores organizational culture in relation to event.
4) Participants' Use of Knowledge and Skills	Is the new content being used and being used correctly?
5) Student Learning Outcomes	The change in the student is how we influence change in teacher beliefs and attitudes.

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Methods

- Qualitative case study
- Members of the CATA who participated in a book circle focused on implicit bias
- Purposive sampling
- Participants were male or female; had taught between 1 and 23 years; and were Hispanic/Latinx, African American or Black, or White
- 20-minute semi-structured Zoom interviews
- Pseudonyms used to protect confidentiality
- Constant comparative analysis was used to develop themes, reviewed two times by two researchers
- Claser (1965) suggested revisiting the data as a component offering increased credibility and transferability when using constant comparative analysis
- Trustworthiness was established via the researchers' familiarity with the participants; the use of member checks; the triangulation of notes, recordings, and observations; use of an audit trail; and coding of themes (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 2007)



Interview Questions

- Describe your current administrative support of your attendance of the 2020 book circle.
- Describe your current departmental support of your attendance of the 2020 book circle.
- Describe any barriers to the implementation of strategies/ideas you learned in the 2020 book circle.
- Describe the impact the book circle has had on your classroom.
- Describe the impact the book circle has had on your program.

Results

Organization Support and Change

Lack of Connection
Inconsistency
External Factors

Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills

Empathy
Awareness
Empowerment

"...WE'VE REALLY FOCUSED WITH OUR OFFICERS...ON BEING MORE INCLUSIVE OF DIFFERENT CULTURES, DEVELOPING VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES THAT APPEAL TO A WIDER VARIETY OF STUDENTS...AND I THINK IT'S GOTTEN A REALLY POSITIVE RESPONSE"

"... THE IMPACT THAT THE BOOK HAD ON MY CLASSROOM WAS THAT I'M A MUCH BETTER TEACHER, AND I CAN FEEL LIKE I CAN RELATE TO A LOT OF MY DIFFERENT STUDENTS FROM ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF BACKGROUNDS. I CAN RECOGNIZE MY OWN BIASES THAT I THOUGHT I ALREADY KNEW EXISTED, AND CLEARLY I DID NOT KNOW WHAT I WAS MISSING OUT ON UNTIL I TOOK THIS UNTIL I READ THIS BOOK AND PARTICIPATE IN THAT BOOK CIRCLE"

"MY ADMINISTRATION ACTUALLY DOES NOT KNOW THAT I PARTICIPATE IN THE BOOK CIRCLE, THEY HAVEN'T REALLY ASKED. SO I JUST KIND OF KEEP IT TO MYSELF"

Conclusions

The book circle appeared to develop empathy, awareness, and empowerment. Emphasis on intentionality of book circles as professional development should be reinforced when interacting with administration as well as encouraging SBAE teacher participation. Teachers felt they better related to others and were empowered in their own teaching spaces, but did not appear to be comfortable sharing their experience.

Future research is needed to better understand the relationship between SBAE teachers and their administration. Additional research should explore teacher perceptions across the remaining evaluation levels with emphasis on exploring student impact and change in teacher belief.