

SBAE Teacher Attitudes regarding the Utilization and Implementation of Culturally Relevant Education Practices

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Introduction/Need for Research

While the United States is growing into a more diverse and pluralistic society, there has been a decrease in diversity among school-based agriculture education (SBAE) teachers. Some have argued that cultural difference is the single most pervasive difference in U.S. schools and the most neglected (Santamaria, 2009). While inclusion, diversity and equity practices were addressed in the Agricultural Education Research Agenda in Priority areas 3 & 5, these trends continue to grow (Roberts, T.G., et al., 2016). Moreover, the need for SBAE teachers who can showcase culturally relevant education (CRE) practices and relevance (Banks & Banks, 2019) has been long overdue. CRE practices incorporate both the students' home/community life and interests into all areas of the classroom. Doing so facilitates a positive environment that welcomes diverse cultures, addresses individual needs and emphasizes equal opportunity for all students (Kea, 2008). While the need is immense, limited research exists on SBAE teacher attitudes toward culturally relevant education practices.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Multiple theories help to explain the willingness of educators to embrace CRE practices. CRE is a holistic framework encompassing multicultural education (Sleeter & Grant, 1987), culturally responsive teaching and instruction (Au, 2009; Gay, 2018), equity pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 1995), culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014), critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2002), and constructivism (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2018). Teachers who embrace this framework, as outlined above, are able to align their teaching practices with student culture, create positive environments that welcome diverse cultures, address individual needs, and emphasize equal opportunity for all students (Mahon, 2006). For this study, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) is the primary focus that guided the research.

Methodology

The purpose and primary objective of this study was to describe the attitudes of SBAE teachers toward CRE practices, and to identify if SBAE teachers are implementing CRE practices into their programs. The target population of this quantitative descriptive study was all Delaware and Utah agricultural educators actively teaching during the 2021- 2022 school year ($N = 335$). During November and December of 2021, an online survey instrument (i.e., Qualtrics) was administered. As part of a larger study, the survey instrument for this specific analysis consisted of 11 CRE practices derived from literature (Gay, 2018; Phuntsog, 2001; Siwatu, 2007). Participants were asked to respond to each item by selecting one of four attitude and behavior choices (i.e., never done and not willing to do, never done but willing to do, I have used this in my program infrequently, and I have used this in my program frequently). Dillman's (2007) was used to elicit responses, with follow up correspondence being sent twice via email to non-responding participants. A total response rate of 22.9% ($N = 77$) was achieved. As part of the larger study, non-response bias was checked and no bias was found.

Results/Findings

Our primary objective was to describe the attitudes and actual use of CRE practices among SBAE teachers. All of the respondents indicated they frequently or infrequently build rapport with each individual student, regardless of background and actively care for each individual student, regardless of their background and interest (see Table 1). The CRE practices most commonly never done by these participants include intentionally building cultural competence among students and teaching curriculum which highlights diverse cultures.

Table 1.

Attitudes and Use of Culturally Responsive Education Practices among SBAE Teachers (N = 77)

CRE Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Teaching curriculum which highlights diverse cultures	2.6	25.0	57.9	14.5
Teaching topics which highlight different points of view	0	7.8	41.6	50.6
Not making assumptions about student backgrounds	3.9	7.9	22.4	65.8
Building rapport with each individual student, regardless of background	0	0	11.7	88.3
Learning about the diverse cultures of my students	0	10.5	43.3	46.1
Demonstrating positive perspectives of other cultures	1.3	9.2	44.7	44.7
Increasing my own cultural competency	2.6	13.2	46.1	38.2
Intentionally building cultural competence among students	5.3	26.3	48.7	19.7
Activating the prior knowledge held by students	5.3	0	31.6	63.2
Connecting material to the lives of my students	0	1.3	20.8	77.9
Actively caring for each individual student, regardless of their background or interest	0	0	10.4	89.6

Note. 1 = Never Done and Not Willing to Do, 2 = Never Done but Willing to Do, 3 = I have used this in my program infrequently, 4 = I have used this in my program frequently

Conclusions/ Recommendations/Impacts

While findings for this study are not generalizable beyond the study population, we believe this research is a critical first step in understanding SBAE teacher attitudes toward CRE, specifically culturally responsive teaching. Our findings show that building rapport and caring for students are the most used practices by participants, which makes sense given SBAE provides a convenient structure through SAE and FFA to build rapport with students. Conversely, teaching cultural competence and curriculum that highlights diverse cultures seems to be lacking among SBAE teachers. We believe this is the result of culturally responsive education, and more broadly inclusion, diversity and equity being a polarized issue in today’s socio-political atmosphere. Perhaps while SBAE teachers care for their students and want to build rapport with them, terms like culturally responsive, culture, and diversity are not received well by some teachers because of how these terms have become politicized. We recommend more research to determine if our assumption is correct. Given some negative attitudes towards the integration of CRE practices, we recommend continued efforts with pre-service teachers to break stereotypes related to inclusion, diversity, and equity. We also recommend more research be conducted to determine why SBAE teachers are less inclined to implement certain CRE practices and the impact teacher preparation programs have on changing attitudes. By shifting perspectives and adopting CRE practices, SBAE teachers will be more likely to establish a culture of inclusivity within their programs, and will be more likely to address the individual needs of their students.

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