

**An Exploratory Study of Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of the Purpose of Career
Development Events**

Tyler J. Price
Doctoral Student
Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant
459 Agricultural Hall Stillwater, OK 74078
Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership
Oklahoma State University
405-714-8289
tyler.price10@okstate.edu

Jon W. Ramsey
Professor
466 Agricultural Hall Stillwater, OK 74078
Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership
Oklahoma State University
405-744-4260
jon.ramsey@okstate.edu

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Introduction

Kolb (1984) noted, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Through theory courses, the researchers believe preservice school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers at Oklahoma State University (OSU) gain an understanding of the concept of Career Development Events in SBAE. However, the researchers question if theory is enough, and should application of the theory be used to better prepare preservice SBAE teachers for implementing CDEs? This intention supports Kolb's (1984) assertion that learning occurs as learners partake in experiences resulting in the transformation of their understanding. Harris (2008) identified the preparation of CDE teams as one of the main areas of teacher interest for professional development. Garton and Chung (1996) reported preparing FFA teams was a perceived professional development need by in-service teachers. Additionally, most teachers identified a two-to-three-hour workshop as their preferred delivery method for training, supporting the development of a short course. Through CDEs, the National FFA Organization provides intra-curricular opportunities for students to apply the knowledge gained in agricultural education courses to a career context related to their interest and develop college and career readiness skills (National FFA Organization, 2022; Phipps et al. 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of preservice SBAE teachers regarding the purpose of CDEs in SBAE. The following research question guided the study: What are the perceptions of preservice SBAE teachers regarding the purpose of CDEs in SBAE?

Conceptual Framework

The Hughes and Barrick (1993) Model for Agricultural Education in Public Schools served as the conceptual framework for this study. The model serves as an expanded version of the Three Component Model of Agricultural Education and aims to serve the growing diversity of students more effectively because of changes in the agricultural industry, society, and the workplace (Hughes & Barrick, 1993). The components of the Hughes and Barrick (1993) model includes classroom and laboratory instruction, application, employment, and career all encompassed in school and community as compared to the traditional three-circle model of agricultural education which includes classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural experiences, and youth development via the National FFA Organization (Phipps et al., 2008).

Methods

This exploratory investigation utilized archival data reported by 12 students enrolled in a one-credit hour short course offered in the spring semester at OSU titled *Training CDEs in SBAE*. Students' demographics reflected five males and seven females ($N=12$). Eleven of the students were undergraduate preservice SBAE teachers, the remaining student was an agricultural communications major focused on youth development. A then/now reflective essay assignment was used to evaluate perceptions of students regarding the purpose of CDEs. The essay assignment included a prompt for participants to reflect on their grasp of the purpose of CDEs in

SBAE and their perception of training teams was collected at the beginning of the course and after course completion. Content analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the data (Saldaña, 2016). This study utilized two researchers to analyze the data and to establish inter-rater reliability in the study. The research team consisted of one graduate student and one faculty member in Agricultural Education at OSU. First-cycle coding was implemented by the research team who independently analyzed the data (Saldaña, 2016). For the first cycle, descriptive coding was used to summarize remarks made by the preservice SBAE teachers into simple words or short phrases (Saldaña, 2016). Once each researcher completed the coding process, the researchers worked together to turn the codes into overarching themes (Saldaña, 2016). Through the content analysis of the 12 student essays, 30 codes were identified that led researchers to identify eight themes. Using the themes, contextual descriptions were developed relating the data to the model of SBAE as described by Hughes and Barrick (1993).

Results

Individual codes were grouped to establish the eight themes. The eight themes included: (1) *CDEs provide opportunities for SBAE students to explore agricultural careers*, (2) *CDEs provide a competitive outlet for SBAE students*, (3) *CDEs provide real-world connections to agriculture*, (4) *CDEs facilitate both technical and employability skills*, (4) *CDEs are an extension of the classroom and laboratory*, (5) *CDEs highlight the intra-curricular nature of the three-component model of SBAE*, (7) *CDEs provide opportunities to integrate community resources in the SBAE program*, and (8) *CDEs have the potential to initiate professional networks*.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of preservice SBAE teachers related to the purpose of CDEs in SBAE. The data aligned with Hughes and Barrick (1993) assertion that agricultural education programs should be a part of the community. The results of this exploratory study support the purpose of CDEs as outlined by the National FFA Organization (2022) and Phipps et al. (2008) who assert the purpose of CDEs is to extend classroom teaching into a career context while preparing students for college and careers within agriculture. The data further confirmed the views of Phipps et al. (2008) and Hughes and Barrick (1993) when students reported their perception on CDEs in SBAE shifting from just an “activity” to providing potential opportunities for career exploration, friendly competition, real-world connections, and an opportunity to involve the community in the program. In addition, the data indicates the need for continued professional development in training CDEs as supported by Garton and Chung (1996). The researchers acknowledge the qualitative approach to this exploratory study was a limitation which does not allow for generalizability above the university level. However, the results of the study do inform the agricultural education teacher preparation program at OSU regarding future research and practice opportunities. It is recommended similar SBAE teacher preparation programs implement a similar approach that provides preservice SBAE teachers the opportunity to apply the intra-curricular nature of CDEs into their future practice as school-based agricultural educators and FFA advisors.

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