

Tools for Another Time: Using a Weekend Course to Build Teacher Efficacy in Training Career Development Events in School-Based Agricultural Education

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The need for this innovation arose when a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University (OSU) recognized the need for preservice school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers to put the theory behind the training of Career Development Events (CDEs) in SBAE, gained in prior teacher preparation courses, into practice. This idea supports Kolb’s (1984) assertion that learning occurs as learners partake in experiences resulting in the transformation of their understanding. In addition to the perceived need for the innovation, 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 need of professional development by in-service teachers. Additionally, they identified many teachers identified a two-to-three-hour workshop as their preferred delivery method for training, supporting the development of a short course. This innovation aligns with Research Priority 5: Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs (Rogers et al., 2016).

Agricultural education can be defined as the instruction of agriculture, food, fiber, and natural resources to elementary through adult learners with the purpose of preparing them for agricultural occupations, entrepreneurship, and increasing their agricultural literacy (Phipps et al., 2008). CDEs provide this intracurricular opportunity 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 Three-Circle Model of Agricultural Education includes: Classroom/laboratory instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE), and student leadership development through the National FFA Organization (Phipps et al., 2008). Successful and effective implementation of this model creates strong programs with the ability to produce individuals capable of becoming leaders in the agriculture industry (National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2022).

How it Works

A one-credit hour weekend short course was developed at OSU. The goals and objectives of *AGED 4990: Training Career Development Events in School-Based Agricultural Education* reflected the purpose of CDEs and highlighted examples of training resources and experiences related to the implementation of CDEs. The 12 students enrolled in the course were sophomore and junior agricultural education majors at OSU. The course occurred over the span of three days and included classroom instruction, small group activities, a self-guided CDE resource module, and site visits. Classroom instruction was used to introduce the purpose of CDEs in SBAE and how they can be implemented into courses in Oklahoma agricultural education. In small groups, students created presentations outlining different CDEs. An online *Canvas* module was created to guide students through various online resources for CDE training. Students participated in five site visits throughout the course designed to introduce community resources that may be available to SBAE teachers for training CDE teams. The site visits included: Walmart, Atwood’s, Lowes, a local nursery, and the OSU Botanical gardens.

Objectives for the course included: (1) Identify the purpose of CDEs in SBAE, (2) Identify how to implement CDEs in the classroom, (3) Discuss the ethics of CDE team selection, (4) Identify training resources for CDEs in Oklahoma, (5) Develop a training timeline for a CDE, (6) Create training resources, and (7) Locate training opportunities in the community (Price, 2022). Students completed a variety of assignments including CDE team presentations featuring the connection of the CDE to courses taught in Oklahoma, a CDE training timeline to implement in their future program, a site visit reflection, CDE identification photograph submissions, CDE resources worksheet, and a reflective essay. With student permission, resources created throughout the course including the team presentations, training timelines, and identification photos were shared with all students to be used in their future programs.

Results/Implications

When asked to reflect on their experience in the course through site visit reflections and reflective essays, students affirmed their appreciation for the class, the resources gathered, and the knowledge gained. In reference to the course, one student stated: “This class has further opened my eyes into how FFA is setting students up for the real world.” Another student offered: “After having taken this class, I understand the importance of needing to invest time in teaching what CDEs are and why we participate in them.” When reflecting on the resources gathered throughout the course, one student shared: “There are so many more ways to train a team than just looking at pictures in the classroom and taking practice test.” These results align with Harris (2008) regarding the need for more training in preparing preservice teachers for CDEs. When looking back on the knowledge gained from the course, one student reported: “I developed a new realization; career development events teach you valuable life skills.” Another student reiterated the importance of tying CDEs to classroom instruction when they stated: “My new understanding of CDEs is that they should be used as a continuation of content being taught in the classroom.” This is supported by Phipps et al. (2008) and the integration of the three-circle model of agricultural education. Results of the innovation supported Kolb’s (1984) views regarding experiential learning.

Advice to Others/Resources Needed

This course offering was born out of the desire to provide preservice SBAE teachers the opportunity to put theory into practice. Teacher preparation programs working to prepare SBAE teachers are encouraged to promote teaching opportunities to doctoral students with SBAE experiences. This innovation can be applied to other areas of preparing SBAE teachers e.g., preparing proficiency applications, writing speeches, supervising Supervised Agricultural Experience projects, and more. Teacher educators should identify the needs and interests of their preservice SBAE teachers and determine if the short-course approach could meet student needs. Resources included a syllabus, course description and proposal, a learning management system for course material distribution, a university vehicle for transport of students to site visits, and all necessary PowerPoints and videos needed to deliver the content of the course. Students incurred a university fee of \$75 associated with a 1-credit hour short course. The only other cost associated with the innovation was the opportunity cost (time) associated with the planning, development, and delivery of the course by the instructor.

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