

Examining the Lived Experiences of California Hispanic Agriculture Teachers

Authors

Samuel Rodriguez, Ed. D

California State University Fresno, CA 93740

559-278-6794

smrodrig@mail.fresnostate.edu

Christian A. Wandeler, Ph.D.

California State University Fresno, CA 93740

559-278-0355

cwandera@mail.fresnostate.edu

Examining the Lived Experiences of California Hispanic Agriculture Teachers

Introduction

Even with an increase of ethnic and racial diversity there continues to be a lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the teaching profession in the U.S. Teachers of color are generally underrepresented in California. Teachers of color are also especially missing from Career and Technical Education (CTE), particularly when considering high school Agriculture teachers in California. According to the California Agriculture Education Supervisor (personal communication, October 3, 2018) there were only 62 Hispanic Agriculture teachers in the state out of the 1222 total Agriculture teachers in academic year 2018. It is a concerning reality, because the number of students with diverse cultural backgrounds in the P-12 schools is rapidly growing. The percentage of those high school students who identify as Hispanic is 54.9 % (3,381,198), while 22.4% (1,381,737) identify as White not Hispanic. With growth in the number of Hispanic students in California, the increase is not mirrored in the number of Hispanic Agriculture Education teachers in California High Schools, Community Colleges, and Universities. The lack of representation in California is alarming as it this also creates a lack of student mentorship by teachers who look like them. The Center for American Progress (2019) shared that the number of students of color entering teacher preparation programs in institutions of higher education has decreased in recent years, reflecting an overall national trend.

Framework

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) served to determine how the sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness of current Hispanic agriculture teachers is essential to their persistence and success in the teaching profession. In addition, Self-Efficacy theory (SE) (Bandura, 1977) was leaned on to explore how Hispanic Agriculture education students that complete their teacher preparation programs and enter the Agriculture Education can build agency in their ability to successfully fulfill the duties of Agriculture teacher. These two theories were complemented with the Funds of Knowledge theory (FK) by Moll et al. (1992). Funds of knowledge theory refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133).

Methodology

A constant comparative approach was used during the qualitative portion of this mixed-method investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The transcribed responses from focus group participants were compared and coded in the data collection process. Focus group participants were divided by years of teaching experience. The first group consisted of nine agriculture teachers, three males, and six females, with 1-10 years of teaching experience. The second group comprised of seven agriculture teachers, six male and one female, with 11 or more years of teaching experience. Pseudonyms were created for participants. The semi-structured, open-ended questions that took place via videoconferencing. Questions discuss the lived experiences that steered them into agriculture teaching as a career, perceived barriers face in pre-service and active teaching. Axial coding was used to categorize data initially by framework (SDT), (SE), and (FK). Triangulation of video recordings, transcripts, and participant verification was used to ensure trustworthiness. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) states that triangulation—whether making use of more than one data collection method, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or

multiple theories—is a powerful strategy for increasing the credibility or internal validity of research.

Findings

Analysis of focus group interview responses yielded three themes that represent their lived experiences as agricultural educators: (1) support through teacher preparation program and career, (2) pressure to succeed, and (3) the need for mentorship.

In the first theme participants shared how they developed socioemotional support systems while completing their teacher preparation program and while actively teaching and other supports they wished they had. They explained how finding fellow Hispanic students and Hispanic faculty helped them to develop agency and navigate the college experience. Vanessa shared that working with Dr. Sanchez at State College helped her to feel at home: “seeing Dr. Sanchez as a Hispanic, being a professor and he was so kind to everyone. I felt at home when I needed to find a piece of home.” They shared how their students that enter agriculture education get turned off of by faculty and leave the major. “Some of us produce some really good quality students that just didn’t have opportunities like that and they’re just as good. But they get lost and they get demotivated and they move to other majors because hey, nobody took an interest in them.” Participants had similar perspectives in the second theme in that they felt they had to constantly prove their professional competence. There was added pressure to succeed from being one of the few Hispanics in agriculture education teacher preparation, and as new teachers entering the profession. Pedro felt the pressure to constantly show colleagues that he was worthy, saying “we have a little more pressure than everybody else because we have to show them that we can succeed. In the third theme participants in the group with more years of experience shared that abilities to perform professionally developed over time. They also shared that they try to mentor younger teachers to help them build their competence and autonomy as professionals. Members of the group with 1-10 years of experience shared that they reach out to their former agriculture teachers and other Hispanic agriculture teachers for mentorship and advice while building their autonomy. Adrian shares that he understands that he has moved into a role of a mentor over time. “I feel comfortable being there for those teachers, that kind of asked for help and the ones that are close that I can help them.”

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations/Impact on the Profession

This study explored the lived experiences of Hispanic agriculture teachers in California. These findings reveal the challenges these teachers face including finding support through their teacher preparation program career, pressure to succeed, and the need for mentorship. Recruiting and retaining Hispanic agriculture teachers will require changes in practices to develop a sense of belonging in the profession. Deci and Ryan (2000) found that a direct corollary of the SDT perspective is that people will tend to pursue goals, domains, and relationships that allow or support their needs satisfaction. Moving forward we recommend that state agriculture teacher association develop professional development opportunities focused on inclusion and mentorship for Hispanic members. We recommend future research on Hispanic female agriculture teachers self-determination as they are growing demographic in the profession. Last but not least, we urge increased focus on creating a pipeline of Hispanic agricultural teachers in order to attract more Hispanic high school and college agriculture students to the field.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.84.2.191>
- Center for American Progress (2017). What to Make of Declining Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs. December 3. Partelow, Lisette. (2019). <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2019/12/03/477311/make-declining-enrollment-teacher-preparation-programs/>.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104_01
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
- Diller, J., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Thomson Wadsworth.
- Knobloch, N. A., & Whittington, M. S. (2003). Differences in teacher efficacy related to career commitment of novice agriculture teachers. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 20(1), 1-11.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132- 141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>