

Fine Points of Classroom Professionalism: California Ag Teachers' Perceptions

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Introduction/Need for Research

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) has emphasized the importance of professionalism (Radhakrishna & Xu, 1997; Hillison, 1987), and others have cited that professionalism embodies good teachers and teaching (Coleman et al., 2021; Eck et al., 2019). While the United States Department of Labor (n.d.) acknowledges professionalism is a combination of visual indicators, competencies and skills, agricultural education literature is dated (Blezek, 1986) and sparse, offering no clear definition of professionalism (Coleman et al., 2021; Radhakrishna & Xu, 1997; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Shoulders & Smith, 2018).

The study is guided by the following research question: How do California agricultural educators perceive professionalism within their SBAE classrooms? The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore recent examples of current perceived professionalism in SBAE, from those who have been identified as exhibiting professionalism. A clearer understanding of the concept of professionalism in California SBAE may aid in fostering the development of a more refined understanding of professional behaviors and practices among agriculture teachers.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) identified personal, behavioral, and environmental factors as perpetually interacting and exerting influence on one another (Bandura, 1991, 2001). While these factors are interacting, individuals still have autonomy over their own behavior and choices (Bandura, 2001). Further, much of what individuals learn is attained via the observations of other persons (Bandura, 1986). SBAE teachers observed in this study were deemed as professional by their State Staff, and using SCT provides a frame to construct how they view themselves as professional in the SBAE classroom.

Methodology

Photovoice is a qualitative method allowing for participants to express their ideas through photographs (Wang & Burris, 1997). Names of SBAE teachers who exemplify professionalism ($n = 60$) were solicited from California agricultural education leaders. Purposive sampling for age, gender, and geographic location (Richie & Lewis, 2003) resulted in 30 invitations sent to participants. Six participants chose to participate in the study. Participants were asked to submit, to a Canvas course shell, photos (3 each) including 250-word or less reflections for context, which they felt exemplified professionalism in the SBAE classroom. Six participants submitted 17 photos and 16 reflections. Participant names were removed from submissions and replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Values coding was identified as the first cycle coding method for this qualitative study identifying belief systems (Saldaña, 2016). The inclusion of multiple sources of information, such as photographs and reflection statements, increases trustworthiness of the study (Saldaña, 2016). Values and attitudes aid in the construction of belief systems (Saldaña, 2016), providing the foundation for understanding how SBAE teachers perceive professionalism in their classrooms.

Results/Findings

Eight themes emerged regarding values of professionalism in the SBAE classroom. Each value is identified with a representative quote in Table 1. Supporting example photographs will be included with the poster.

Table 1

Perceived Professional Values of California SBAE Teachers Concerning Classroom

Value	Sample Quote
Modeling	“...the horticulture class is learning to correctly secure a large cactus after it sustained damage from a wind event.” (Kristin)
Organization	“...if parents and students know exactly how to find out what students are missing/working on, that shows you have professionalism and respect for those who care about their students and grades.” (Danielle)
Safety	“Students are wearing gloves and following safety procedures.” (Kristin)
Dress	“I teach my students how to tie a professional looking tie and encourage each of them to wear a tie on test day as well.” (Patrick)
Collaboration	“The presence of professionals from various fields allows students to connect understanding of how their academic knowledge translates into practical skills.” (Janet)
Content Expertise	“students can learn from the expertise shared...” (Kristin)
Relationships	“...recognizing that education is not just about delivering information...these teachers use humor and enjoyable activities to break down barriers.” (Janet)
Learner Engagement	“...that you provide opportunities for them to engage with one another and experience what others may need help with.” (Danielle)

Conclusions

SBAE teachers, identified as demonstrating professionalism, saw themselves as role models being organized, following safety practices, and dressing appropriately for the varied needs of their classroom spaces. Being engaging and collaborative educators who remember the importance of relationship building was important to the professional image they portrayed in the classroom. These findings are consistent with SCT and align with Bandura’s (2001) notion of human agency, where individuals intentionally selected photos and wrote reflections to illustrate how they value their own professionalism. Photos collected in this study will be shared with the poster as depictions of how SBAE teachers view their own agency in the SBAE classroom.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the participating teachers’ perceptions of professionalism in their classroom and was part of a larger study that explored all three circles of SBAE. When clearer communication of professional SBAE values is understood, there can be a consistent implementation of professionalism across all states. Practitioners in teacher education should consider how they offer opportunities for candidates to develop values, attitudes, and beliefs about professionalism. As this study focused on California SBAE teachers, researchers should attempt to replicate this study with their own teaching populations.

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