

Beneath the Surface: Self-Perceived Professionalism in Agriculture Education

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Introduction/Need for Research

California agricultural education leadership deemed professionalism a topic of interest within their own teacher learning and support systems (M. Patton, personal communication, May 6, 2023). Professionalism is important to the role of the teacher and in school-based agricultural education (SBAE) (Coleman et al., 2021; Hillison, 1981; Radhakrishna & Xu, 1997; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Shoulders & Smith, 2018). Research has shown teachers of SBAE are viewed less than what has been deemed classically professional (Blezek, 1986). While the United States Department of Labor (n.d.) indicated professionalism is represented visually and via characteristics and skills, there is no recent SBAE literature on how professionalism is defined or how it may differ across the three programmatic components of classroom, leadership and supervised agricultural education (SAE). To help bridge this gap, this research focused on exploring the perceived professionalism across the three circles of SBAE, among California SBAE teachers who have been identified as exhibiting professionalism by California agricultural education leadership. Understanding more about what SBAE teachers value in being a professional may help create a definition of what professionalism is in SBAE and aid in the advancement of teacher learning in California.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1991, 2001) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) framed this study as professionalism involves personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, which are constantly interacting with one another. Human agency influences SCT as individuals have autonomy over their own behavior (Bandura, 2001). In this study, SBAE teachers exert their own agency in identifying examples of what professionalism looks like within the profession of teaching SBAE, thus SCT provides a space to scaffold meaning for their own perceived professionalism.

Methodology

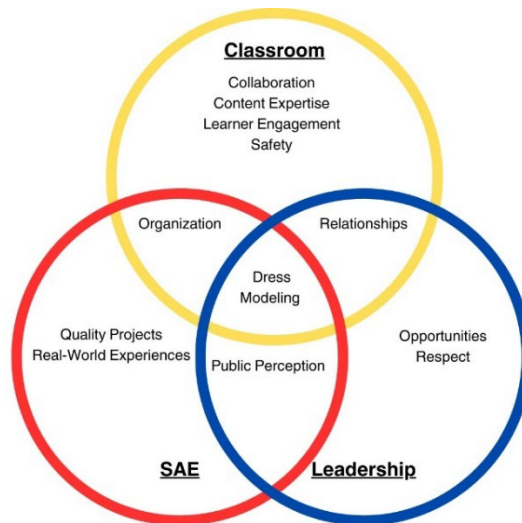
This qualitative study used photovoice for participants to express their perceived professionalism via photographs (Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants ($n = 60$) were nominated by California agricultural education leadership as those who exemplify professionalism. Thirty participants were invited, using purposive sampling for age, gender, and geographic location (Richie & Lewis, 2003). Six participants opted to participate in the study. Participants were asked to each submit 9 photos, 3 from each program component of SBAE (Classroom, Leadership, and Supervised Agricultural Experience) and include 250-word reflections per photo, to provide context. Participants submitted 17 photos and 16 reflections for classroom and 15 photos and reflections each for leadership and SAE. Participant names were replaced with pseudonyms and photos and reflections were kept together during analysis. Photos and reflections were thematically evaluated, based on the program component they represented (classroom, leadership, and SAE) using values coding. Saldaña (2016) recommended values coding as a first cycle coding method for identifying values and attitudes contributing to beliefs. These themes were then compared across programmatic components to look for differences and commonalities.

Results/Findings

Thirteen values were deduced across the 3 programmatic components, with 2 found commonly across all 3 elements (Figure 1). Classroom and SAE shared the value of organization, while classroom and leadership shared relationships. Public perception was considered a shared value for leadership and SAE. Quotations and photographs will be included with the poster as evidence supporting the themes which surfaced.

Figure 1

Perceived Values of Professionalism in SBAE Teachers by Programmatic Component



Conclusions

Professionalism appeared to differ across the programmatic foundations of SBAE. It can be deduced, across all three programmatic components, SBAE teachers, deemed as having professionalism, believed appropriate modeling and dress make them professionals in SBAE. The human agency expressed, via the intentional selection of photos and reflective words, provides insight into how SCT (Bandura, 1991, 2001) informs perceived values of professionalism among SBAE teachers in California.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

This research provides a starting point for defining what professionalism is in California SBAE. The values expressed by the participants in this study are only indicative of the individuals they came from. Further studies should seek to replicate this process in their own states and with their own teachers. Also, those who were not deemed as professional in California should be scrutinized for differences or similarities. Understanding what factors influenced agricultural education leadership to identify SBAE teachers as those who are professional would also be of interest. Additional exploration of why certain themes did not surface in some components (e.g., public perception was not a theme concerning the classroom) could shed light on needs for pre-service and in-service teacher learning. Teacher educators in California should consider these findings when addressing professionalism in learning spaces.

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