

Seeds of Professionalism: Unearthing Leadership Perspectives in Agricultural Education

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Introduction/Need for Research

Good teachers are those who embody professionalism and professionalism influences good teaching (Coleman et al., 2021; Eck et al., 2019). In California, professionalism has been identified as an item of importance for school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers (M. Patton, personal communication, May 6, 2023). SBAE is built on three foundational components (classroom, leadership, and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE)) and these components play specific roles in SBAE programs. As such, it is crucial to investigate each of these rings separately. This research explores California's SBAE teachers' perspectives of professionalism within the context of leadership.

The United States Department of Labor (n.d.) defines professionalism as more than what is visible and includes a combination of competencies and skills. Within SBAE, there is limited literature citing what professionalism is and professionalism is not addressed as a specific topic of interest after 1986 (Blezek, 1986). Literature which references professionalism, identifies it as a characteristic necessary for being effective, but does not clarify what professionalism looks like (Coleman et al., 2021; Radhakrishna & Xu, 1997; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Shoulders & Smith, 2018). Exploring perceptions of SBAE teachers and how they view their own professionalism, in the context of leadership development, may provide clues as to what can be done to support the development of professionalism in the leadership circle of SBAE.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Participants in this study were described as *professional* by California agricultural education leaders. However, how they view themselves as professionals within the context of the leadership circle of SBAE is unclear. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a frame to explore the personal, behavioral, and environmental factors continuously interacting and informing teachers of SBAE in their programs (Bandura, 1991, 2001). Using SCT as a framework for this study acknowledges the idea that learning occurs via the observation of others' behaviors (Bandura, 1986) and those behaviors are enacted via the actions of others (Bandura, 2001).

Methodology

Wang and Burris (1997) identified photovoice as an active participant research strategy used to document concerns, promote dialogue, and reach broader policy decision makers. This qualitative methodology guided the exploration of professionalism in the leadership circle of SBAE. Potential participants ($n = 60$) were identified by California agricultural education leaders as those who exemplified professionalism in SBAE. Purposive sampling, accounting for representation of age, gender, and geographic location (Richie & Lewis, 2003), was used to generate 30 participant invites; 6 invitees opted to participate. Participants were asked to upload three photos they felt represented teacher professionalism in the leadership development circle of SBAE, to a Canvas course shell. Reflections, no longer than 250 words, were solicited to provide thick description of the photos. Five participants submitted a total of 15 photos and reflections. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Researchers analyzed photos and reflections for thematic values and attitudes, to construct participant beliefs concerning professionalism in the leadership component of SBAE (Saldaña, 2016). The combined use of reflections and photos contributed to the trustworthiness of the themes (Saldaña, 2016).

Results/Findings

Seven values of interest surfaced concerning perceived professionalism in the leadership component of SBAE. Values and sample quotations are provided in Table 1. Supporting photographs will be provided with the poster.

Table 1

Perceived Professional Values of California SBAE Teachers Concerning Leadership

Value	Sample Quote
Modeling	“Our students are watching us.” (Danielle)
Dress	“Professionalism is making sure your students are dressed appropriately and that you are dressed appropriately at conferences.” (Suzanne)
Public Perception	“The advisors were given a hat from the sponsor and to show our appreciation. I decided to wear their hat for our team photo.” (Patrick)
Opportunities	“...were excited about the new experience, what they had learned, and felt fancy attending the dinner at the conclusion of the event.” (Kristin)
Sportsmanship	“...never speak poorly about your students, other teams, or other teachers.” (Danielle)
Respect	“A strong sense of unity instills a shared commitment to organizational goals, fostering a culture where members support each other...” (Janet)
Relationship	“We are helping students to interact...helping them learn boundaries and building relationships with trusted adults.” (Kristin)

Conclusions

Within the leadership facet of Agricultural Education, SBAE teachers saw themselves as professional when they were modeling to students, dressing appropriately, focusing on relationships, providing opportunities to students, and portraying a specific image to the public including being respectful and exhibiting good sportsmanship. Consistent with SCT, the observations of the behaviors of others were important in the perceptions of SBAE teachers’ views of their own professionalism. In this exploration, the concept of human agency, where individuals make intentional decisions to enact change (Bandura, 2001), was evident by the photos and reflections participants chose to share as representations of their professionalism. The photographs collected will be shared with this poster to further illustrate how teachers give purpose via their own agency in the leadership circle of SBAE and how they construct the beliefs of what professionalism is.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact on Profession

The results of this exploration are part of a larger study exploring what professionalism looks like to California SBAE teachers identified as being *professional*. The results are only based on California educators and should not be generalized to fit SBAE teachers from other states. Given the minimal literature discussing what professionalism looks like in SBAE, the results of this study support the need to develop a model of what defines *professionalism*. Further, understanding the metrics used by those who identified the participants in this study is important for future research, as well as determining if professionalism in the leadership circle of SBAE differs from its contemporary circles of classroom and SAE. Recommendations for practitioners include focusing on the more inward-facing and reflective side of professionalism, not just what is seen publicly.

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