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*Summertime Blues*

## The Summertime Blues: Do They Really Exist?

by John C. Ewing

What are the Summertime Blues and do they exist were two thoughts that kept running through my mind, as I prepared this issue. Beyond the song (written in 1958) and then made popular in country music circles by Alan Jackson about 40 years later, how are the Summertime Blues defined. Well, the Summertime Blues is that point of realization that summer is winding down, and it will soon be time to start back to school for both teachers and students. Wait, summer is over? Where did it go? I didn't even realize that summer "vacation" had started. I believe that these are questions that all agricultural education teachers have asked themselves over the years. This is the point in the summer where you are thinking that you have so much more to do, and very little time to get it done. While it may be too late for you to finish this summer's to-do list, there is still time to take the advice in the following pages to have a great academic year. Additionally, this is the perfect time to think about how you can be ready to "beat" the Summertime Blues in the future! As you read the articles in this issue, I believe you will see that much of beating, or even avoiding the Summertime Blues, is all about planning. Planning what matters to make you a

better teacher, mentor, and leader is critical to your success in conquering the Summertime Blues.

### Too Busy for the Summertime Blues

This issue is has been a fun issue to edit; as it gave me an opportunity to reflect on what it is that agricultural education teachers engage in that sets them apart from other education professionals, during this time of the annual cycle of the school year. Yes, all teachers look for ways to enjoy and grow during that "down time" from daily teaching. However, as agricultural education teachers we don't have to look for work to keep us busy in the summer. We have opportunities to supervise our students' SAE projects, engage in professional development through our state associations, and just sit back to reflect and relax for a bit before the new school year is upon us. With all that is going on around us, from county fairs, to curriculum update workshops, to spending some time with family, it is easy to see how the summer goes by so quickly. Be sure to take time to do what is important to your future success as a teacher. The message here is stay busy and engaged, but be willing to schedule time for yourself.

### Ideas to Overcome/Plan for the Summertime Blues

I hope that this issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine* proves to be as informative to you, as it has been for me. I know that it has provided me with great ideas to grow, and to help others in our profession develop into even better teachers. I think one major takeaway for me in this issue has been that, as with any part of our life, we need to be purposeful about planning our summer so that we can gain the most benefit from this aspect of being a teacher! Use your time wisely to benefit you, your students, and the program. If you take the advice in the following pages, I believe you will see that there are ways to avoid the realization that summer is ending, and many ways to be better prepared when that first day of school does arrive, as we know it will. Best wishes on the start of another academic year and be sure to enjoy every day of the school year, because it won't be long and we will all be working to figure out the best way to spend our summer "vacation"!



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**Cover:** Front and Back Cover photo by Laura Rice. Pennsylvania agriculture education teachers engaged in Professional Development to "beat the summertime blues".

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## *There is a Cure for the Summertime Blues*

by Rebekah Epps

**A**s a teenager in the 90's in the deep south, I was surrounded by country music legends including George, Garth, Reba, Alabama, and Alan Jackson. One of the most memorable songs was by Alan Jackson singing about "No Cure for the Summertime Blues". Well, Alan didn't originate the song, but Eddie Cochran did in 1958. It was then covered by The Beach Boys in 1962, The Who in 1970 and Alan Jackson in 1994. Well, it is obvious that we have been singing about the Summertime Blues for almost 60 years now! While we may not have found the exact cure for the Summertime Blues, there are several strategies that teachers can take to alleviate some of the perils of the summertime blues.

One of the most important areas to beat the Summertime Blues is to reflect on what occurred in your classroom that you can improve. Use the summer to really search out professional development that can improve those areas. Maybe you are struggling with teaching the same thing, the same way, just a different year. My mentor stressed that I throw out all my old lesson plans that were "safe" and dated. I then began rewriting curriculum that would increase reading among my students—this was a school wide initiative that I hadn't fully embraced previously due to the excuse of time constraints. Maybe you find that your courses need to increase in rigor and relevance

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of science. Consider attending a CASE Institute to really embrace inquiry based learning. Perhaps there is a particular content area that you are lacking in that you want to offer in the future. Seek out experts in your community in that content area. I spent an entire week with a local florist learning the basics from taking phone orders, to creating funeral arrangements, bridal bouquets, and even deliveries. These were imperative when it came time to teach floral design. I realized there were many basic employability skills that my students would need in order to succeed with a career in the floral industry right out of high school.

The second way that teachers can recharge in the summertime is to rekindle that passion for a hobby. We constantly encourage our students to find their passion and go after it. However, we aren't very good at taking our own advice at times. Teachers need an outlet for their hobby. It may be making furniture, scrapbooking, reading, photography, or even cooking. Try and remember the things we did for fun before teaching consumed our lives. Maybe it was camping, playing guitar, writing poetry, or even participating in your local community theater. In order to help find a better balance, teachers need to plug into that passion and find an outlet to interact with other adults that have the same interests. Learning something new or more in-depth is a great way to rekindle your own learning!

Another way is for teachers to travel, but not from their own community. I know it sounds im-

possible to travel and not leave. Consider the hidden gems that you haven't explored in your own community. When was the last time your students went to a local farm that was doing things a little non-traditional? What about the stream restoration project that has been going on, but you haven't had time to explore? Community engagement in groups like the local Young Farmers, Farm Bureau, and the Cattleman's or Pork Producer's is a wonderful way to meet people and make connections. Use those connections to plan field trips for your students and visit them in the summer. Most farmer's and community groups are more than willing to share their resources, but have to be asked. Use your summertime to make that happen.

Last but definitely not least, is to take time for yourself and rest. Teachers give all they have to their schools and students during the school year. Use the summertime to plan and take time for yourself. It's important to slow down and beat those Summertime Blues in order to be rested and ready to give all to our students.



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*The Agricultural Education Magazine*



## *A Conceptual Model for Student Empowerment in School-Based Agricultural Education*

by Lee Thomsen

Public schools in America once operated under a system in which teachers have all the power and choice and students are expected to obey and perform as the teachers see fit. However, in recent years, an abundance of literature has been published regarding the importance of student empowerment and choice in education. This is exemplified in a study by Nichols (2006), who concluded veteran teachers spent less time fostering student empowerment and providing positive affirmation in the classroom, while preservice teachers indicated this would be a primary concern. Theories of motivation, self-determination, and self-efficacy have surfaced in order to encourage a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education. In School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE), we as teachers should continue to conceptualize ways to make our classrooms and our chapters of the National FFA Organization more learner-centered. In this article, I propose a conceptual model for integrating student empowerment and choice into SBAE.

McQuillan (2005) posited student empowerment manifests itself in three categories: academic, political, and social. Academic empowerment is the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically based upon an understanding of instructional and educational structures. Political

empowerment is further broken down into two forms: formal (student involvement on an educational board, like a student council) and informal (student ability to elicit change with their actions, like organizing a “walk out”). Finally, social empowerment comes as a result of positive student relationships with their teachers, administrators, and peers. These three aspects of student empowerment in schools, McQuillan says, are mutually reinforcing. That is, an increased level of empowerment in one area results in increased empowerment in the others.

Student empowerment comes as a result of both individual (student) characteristics and situational (teacher) characteristics (Houser & Frymier, 2009). Students’ level of intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and locus of control have as much of an effect on student empowerment as the learning environment they are subjected to, which is primarily a result of the teacher. Teacher clarity, Houser and Frymier (2009) conclude, is a primary predictor of student empowerment and learning. Additionally, consistency in choice-making opportunities across classes and situations leads to increased levels of student motivation and empowerment (Brooks & Young, 2011). For example, if a teacher provides choice in which form a project may take in one unit of a class, they should pro-

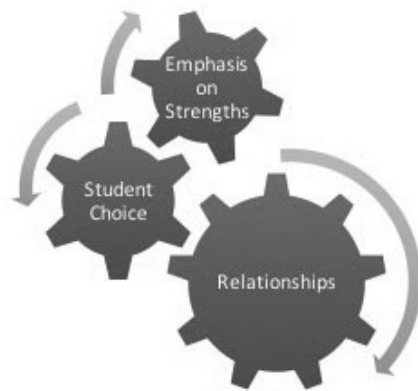
vide the same amount of choice in other projects.

In the area of agricultural education, research has been conducted using these theories and discussing their importance in School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE). A youth organization is intra-curricular, meaning that the activities conducted by the organization are implemented cohesively both inside and outside of the formal classroom. The nature of SBAE and the National FFA Organization lends itself to this, as students have the opportunity to participate in Career Development Events (CDEs) and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs reflecting the knowledge they have gained in the classroom.

Research has been conducted on best practices for coaching students for Career Development Events, concluding that providing opportunities for students to train with collegiate teams who have been in their shoes, attending camps to learn additional skills for contests, and practicing the contest exactly as it will be conducted lead to high levels of achievement (Rayfield et al., 2009). Furthermore, positive relationships with coach and team were found as primary predictors for CDE achievement (Ball, Bowling, & Sharpless, 2016).

From the literature, I have conceptualized a model for our – the advisors’ – role in empowering students in a youth organization

in order to allow them to succeed in all three facets of SBAE: classroom, FFA, and SAE. In my conceptual model, I emphasize student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships as a key component. Additional primary components are student choice and encouraging involvement based upon students' strengths. This model is drafted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**

I chose to utilize three gears in my model in order to follow McQuillan's (2005) notion that facets of student empowerment are mutually reinforcing. "Relationships" was intentionally chosen to occupy the largest gear, because I believe relationships anchor student empowerment in a youth organization. When this gear turns, the other two follow suit. As advisors, it is our responsibility to foster positive relationships in classroom and in our youth organization. Our relationships with our students should be professional, encouraging, and empowering. Additionally, we should provide students with the opportunity to take an active role in supporting one another, either through peer mentoring in CDEs, holding each other accountable for SAEs, or tu-

toring for difficult classroom concepts.

The other two gears, "Student Choice" and "Emphasis on Strengths", are also borne from the literature. There is no one "catch-all" way to assess every student, and choice must be provided in order to empower the students and allow them to succeed academically. Providing choice to our students allows them to naturally gravitate toward activities where they can each utilize their own unique strengths. As teachers and advisors, it is then our responsibility to further invest in teacher-to-student relationships by learning our students' strengths. Emphasizing these strengths and allowing students to participate in activities – formal or informal – which allow them to utilize their natural abilities, will increase self-efficacy and, ultimately, make them feel empowered.

Following Nichols (2006), as a preservice teacher, I identify student empowerment as a primary concern when I consider advising my own chapter of the FFA. It is my hope that this conceptual model will help to foster student empowerment in a variety of ways in our classrooms. When our students feel empowered, the culture of the youth organization will change for the better. Students will succeed in chosen activities which align with their strengths, and relationships among the advisor and the chapter members will be mutually beneficial.

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# Streamlining the Summer To-Do-List

by Kate Shoulders and Billy Eddy

While nearly every agriculture teacher keeps a busy summer schedule, the warm weather also brings with it an opportunity to pause and reset before the fall. The school is quieter, your schedule is more relaxed, the students aren't filling up your rooms every day... a walk through the program's fa-

in the class swarmed the crowded tables to wait their turn to weld, and you worried that they were spending too much time off task? Or that SAE bulletin board – when was the last time that was updated, anyway? And that greenhouse, full of the remnants of plantings from the spring – the students were so engaged in the plant production,

your entire summer. Program improvement should be a positive thing, but where do you even start?

That question is not actually a rhetorical one...the answer lies within the National Quality Program Standards.

Standards in general get a bad rap. Often (and unfairly) synonymous among teachers with a feeling of limiting one's instructional freedom, standards can actually serve as guidelines, assisting you in determining the most beneficial course of action when making decisions for your program. The intention of this article is to share with you ways to use the National Quality Program Standards to guide you through the program development process. Whether you're entering a position by filling the well-worn shoes of a previous teacher, starting up a brand new agricultural education pro-

The growth plan identifies your program's most critical quality indicators and guides you in creating action items at thirty days, six months, and nine months in order to meet your target rubric score.

cilities allows you to reminisce on all the learning that occurred there, reflecting a bit on the past while considering the future. Like those three welding booths – remember how the thirty students

but their plant science test scores were terrible! What went wrong there?? It doesn't take long for a peaceful stroll through your facilities to turn in to an ever-mounting to-do list, threatening to consume

	Program meets or exceeds quality expectation			Program does not meet quality expectation	
	<b>EXEMPLARY</b> 5	<b>EXCEEDS EXPECTATION</b> 4	<b>MEETS EXPECTATION</b> 3	<b>APPROACHING EXPECTATION</b> 2	<b>NOT AT EXPECTATION</b> 1
<b>Indicator Rubric</b>	Advanced courses within each POS are in alignment with post-secondary program standards.	Logically and sequentially organized POS include course descriptions, objectives, prerequisites, and are aligned to AFNR Content Standards.	The courses in the POS are organized logically and sequentially from introductory to advanced levels.	The courses are organized logically but do not follow a sequence of learning.	Organization and sequencing of courses is limited or non-existent.
<b>Suggested Evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of alignment with post-secondary program standards for each POS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of course descriptions, objectives, prerequisites, and AFNR Content Standard alignment for each POS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of logically and sequentially organized courses within each POS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of organized course offerings for each POS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documentation of course offerings lacking organization and sequencing for each POS.</li> </ul>

An example of a rubric for one of the quality indicators.



gram, or just taking a look around the program you built years ago, the National Quality Program Standards provides guidelines that help you efficiently identify where you are, and where you might want to go, and how you can get there.

### **An Introduction to the National Quality Program Standards**

According to the National FFA Organization, the National Quality Program Standards is a tool for teachers to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their programs, identify clear goals for program growth, and encourage collaboration with local stakeholders. The National Quality Program Standards are not nationally mandated, and they don't evaluate individual teachers – instead, they evaluate a program on a set of benchmarks considered to be found within an ideal program. Using the standards, teachers can assess their program design and instruction (with four sub-areas, including curriculum and program design, instruction, facilities and equipment, and assessment), learning through SAE, growth through FFA, school and community partnerships, marketing, certified teachers and professional growth, and program planning and evaluation. Each standard is then broken down into a subset of quality indicators, and each quality indicator is accompanied by a rubric to assist the teacher in identifying the program's current performance level. Scores range from one to five, with the lowest two scores being indicative of a program “not meeting expectation” and the top three indicating the

program is meeting or exceeding quality expectations.

Once a teacher scores each quality indicator on the National FFA Organization's website (and if you log in and click on the Instructor Resources in your dash-

While program evaluation can occur at any time, the summer months give you an opportunity to focus on those aspects of the program that become invisible during the day-to-day practice of teaching students.

board, you should be able to access the online entry system with ease), the system will generate a report of your completed standards and a customized growth plan. The growth plan identifies your program's most critical quality indicators and guides you in creating action items at thirty days, six months, and nine months in order to meet your target rubric score. This document can be helpful when setting your pace for your summer to-do list, even taking you right through the next school year.

### **Putting the National Quality Program Standards to Use – Are They Right for You?**

Because the standards do not evaluate individual teachers, they're incredibly usable for any teacher working in an agriculture program. In our experience, the National Quality Program Standards can be used in one of three ways:

1. Redesigning an Existing Program – The National Quality Program Standards give you a map through which you can

take a self-guided tour of your new program. Simply start with a standard of your choosing, and identify evidence (suggested within the rubrics) to determine your program's score on each quality indica-

tor. Preservice teachers at the University of Arkansas engage in this practice during their teaching residency in order to familiarize them with the process of program evaluation before they are employed. The standards allow the teaching resident to focus on aspects of the program they may otherwise miss amid the program's reputation within the state. Even well reputed programs have areas of improvement, and the National Quality Program Standards uncover those areas by accurately identifying how close to “exemplary” the program is on each quality indicator. Teachers entering an existing program can utilize the National Quality Program Standards to orient themselves with the program. The standards give you focus in your exploration of your new instructional environment, allowing you to ask purposeful questions to stakeholders. By using the standards to become familiar with a program, you can gain credibility with the existing students, parents, and



community members – by the time school begins in the fall, you’ll be prepared to discuss every aspect of the program as though you had taught in it for years. The standards will also give you a head start in determining which changes are the most crucial for the program’s success.

2. **Designing a New Program – Creating an agricultural education program from scratch** can be both exciting and intimidating – while you have a blank slate from which to begin, the program won’t benefit from the advice acquired through history. The standards supply you with a list of tasks that are high, medium, and low priority so you can address those that are most crucial for success first. Additionally, following the standards ensures your actions aren’t off the mark for a premier agricultural education program.
3. **Promoting Your Program to Stakeholders – Sharing the National Quality Program Standards** with your stakeholders can help you secure resources, buy-in, and credibility. Some teachers share a completed program growth plan with administrators and advisory councils, and others request stakeholder involvement in completing program evaluation using the National Quality Program Standards. While the latter can create stronger buy-in, the time required to conduct an objective evaluation may be more than your stakeholders are willing to donate. Occasion-

ally, you may have one or two stakeholders with a hidden agenda, and they may evaluate the program with an eye toward their personal interests. In these instances, supplying stakeholders with a completed program improvement plan may be more productive. A program improvement plan can show your administrators you’re committed to leading a program that meets national benchmarks and can give you justification for making equipment and resource requests. The third party recommendation to acquire specific supplies, especially when that third party is the national standard for the profession, can hold more weight than requests made from your own interests. Sharing the program growth plan, and the steps taken to develop it, with your students, parents, and advisory council can ease tensions related to program changes. Oftentimes, these stakeholders can be passionate advocates for tradition within a program – they may have been engaging in these practices for generations. Proposing changes in an objective manner can reduce concerns that your suggestions for change are yours alone, or are not in the best interest of the program. By reducing these concerns and creating buy-in, you can pave the way for smoother transitions toward an improved program.

While program evaluation can occur at any time, the summer months give you an opportu-

nity to focus on those aspects of the program that become invisible during the day-to-day practice of teaching students. By walking through the National Quality Program Standards each summer, you can ensure continuous, sustained improvement without feeling as though you’re sacrificing your own down time on a never-ending list of projects.



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## *Chase Away Those Summertime Blues with Effective Professional Development*

by Kendall M. Wright

Summer as an agricultural educator is filled with exciting and challenging events, including FFA Camp, county fairs, preparation for State Fairs, and completing SAE visits. With so much going on, seeking professional development outside of the sessions required by the school district may seem unworthy of dedicating already stretched time. However, professional development opportunities need not take large amounts of time to be effective,

professional development this summer, we must first take some time to reflect upon where we are as educators. Self-reflection is essential to determining our goals for professional development. Ask questions like, “What do I feel I do well? What could I improve upon? What are my weaknesses as an educator? In which content area would I like to improve my understanding? What unit or topic have I always wanted to include in my class, but just haven’t had time to research and figure out how to

out our goals in that area. For example, we may want to improve our understanding of how to incorporate more science standards into a greenhouse course. Maybe we would like to incorporate a service learning component into our Ag Construction course. Regardless of the topic, it is vital to have a clear understanding of how we want to improve in order to move forward with the next step in choosing effective professional development.

Due to a plethora of professional development opportunities, we are bombarded with different offers for summer sessions. While many look interesting and useful, it is important to remember our goals created based upon our self-reflection. Don’t be swallowed up by all the PD offerings. Instead, be choosy! Our time as educators is valuable, which means that the professional development we choose to include in our time needs to also be valuable. Stay true to our goals- choose only those sessions which will help us improve on our chosen areas.

Not sure where to look to find meaningful professional development? Check out these options:

- School-based professional development: This professional development is great if you are seeking to improve pedagogically. Because most school based PD is geared towards teachers of

Self-reflection is essential to determining our goals for professional development.... Once we have engaged in self-reflection, we should choose only a few areas to focus on and write out our goals in that area.

and time spent in professional development sessions geared toward our personal needs as educators can not only improve our pedagogical practices, but also save us time throughout the year as we implement the things we’ve learned. If tailored to our individual needs, professional development can serve as an efficient method of recharging our motivation and improving our practice while simultaneously curing those summer time blues (Teras, 2016)!

In order to make the most of the time we have to dedicate to

connect it to the lessons I already have?” Questions such as these help us assess our professional identity. Understanding ourselves as professionals is vital to choosing effective PD, as our needs are based on our own experiences and unique knowledge sets (Shoulders & Meyers, 2011). Thus, our self-evaluation should inform our choice of the types of professional development we seek during our summer months.

Once we have engaged in self-reflection, we should choose only a few areas to focus on and write

Don't be swallowed up by all the PD offerings. Instead, be choosy!

all subjects, it's a great one to find ways to collaborate with teachers in our school. It's also a great time to build relationships with other teachers and to teach them about our programs so they have a better understanding of what students do in agriculture classes. This is always great because it allows us to build rapport with our colleagues.

- State conferences: Teacher associations often host their state conferences in the summer, which provides a great opportunity for teachers of the same subject to collaborate and share lesson plans, lab ideas, and FFA activities. In addition to fresh ideas, this is a great place to find a friend or mentor who completely understands the struggles we go through on a daily basis.
- Technical/content: Agriculture is a HUGE industry and there is no way to be a master in all areas. Thus, technical and content trainings can help us brush up on content we aren't as familiar with, but still need to teach students. Furthermore, this type of training allows us to work with industry professionals so we can be sure we are teaching our students pertinent skills.

- Virtual Book Club: The National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) hosts this PD every year and focuses on a selected book meant to improve some aspect of teaching. Joining this club means committing to reading the chosen book and participating in web based conversations and individual activities based on the text. Moreover, by the end of the Book Club, participants will have developed a Personal Performance Plan that identifies ways to incorporate lessons from the book into their daily teaching practices.

Once we've identified and attended the professional development event which best suits our needs, the final step is to create a plan to implement what we've learned in our daily practice for the coming year.

- Regional NAAE Meetings: These meetings are a great location to interact with leaders from our region's agricultural education teacher associations. NAAE state leaders share updates about regional and national committee work, a staff member shares updates about opportunities available through

NAAE, and tours of agriculture industry locations are arranged. These meetings allow teachers to take leadership roles in our field, but also allows us to connect with advocates for agricultural education as well as industry professionals.

- Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE): Want to spice up your curriculum and utilize inquiry based learning to include more science? Attending a two-week CASE Institute can do just that! Leave this intense two-week PD with a full set of curriculum for a variety of courses and learn inquiry based teaching strategies along the way.
- National Agriscience Teacher Ambassador Program (NATAA): This is another great opportunity to improve upon inquiry based teaching strate-

gies and to learn to incorporate critical thinking in our classrooms. Participants chosen for NATAA attend a week-long training session and also have the opportunity to facilitate workshops at both National FFA and NAAE Conventions.

- International opportunities: Want to do something a little different this summer? Look

*Continued on page 14*



## *Beating the Summertime Blues* *Recharge. Reflect. Renew.*

by Samuel Evans

**A**s agriculture teachers, we are subjected to different summers than the rest of the teachers in our buildings. In many states, our June's and July's are

should give credit to John Maxwell for this wisdom...

My number one tip for beating the summertime blues as a teacher is to add structure and rou-

with our summer as well. Having a planner and planning out your days in advance and then taking that list of goals for the summer and assigning them to the specific days is the best way to complete those tasks. The key to a productive summer and beating the summertime blues is prioritizing your time and putting the most important tasks at the top of your list.

Now that we have talked about the groundwork of making all of this happen, let's talk about some of those tasks.

First and foremost, the number one thing on your plate should be to recharge. Recharging means different things to different people. My wife and two-year-old son and I thoroughly enjoy hiking. We will endeavor to go hiking two or three times this summer on days when it is not blazing hot. Some people enjoy their hobbies. I do a little woodworking with my free time and enjoy the process even more so because I listen to podcasts over topics that interest me and learn while I am being productive and having a recharge fix. Something else that is vitally important is travel. Before I was married, I did a little traveling and I went to a few concerts. Since I have been married, my amount of travel and concerts attended has certainly skyrocketed.

Why? Because my wife plans stuff. We have all heard the old adage of "If you fail to plan, you

Many times, a sense of overwhelm and lonesomeness can come over teachers who are burdened by all of the expectations of the summer. A proverbial dread before the summer even kicks off.

spent at conferences, leadership trainings for our students, local and state fairs, livestock shows and SAE visits. I remember when I first began teaching, the director of our FFA Leadership Training Center (FFA Camp) counted all the different events that takes place each summer for agriculture teachers and then counted how many weeks there were in a summer. The weeks of activities ALWAYS outnumbered the weeks of summer. Many times, a sense of overwhelm and lonesomeness can come over teachers who are burdened by all of the expectations of the summer. A proverbial dread before the summer even kicks off.

### **So how does one "beat" The summertime blues?**

I am a big fan of starting with the first things first. Putting the most important things at the top of the list and then working through that list accordingly. I suppose I

tine to your summer. Why would I say this? As humans, we are creatures of habit. We conform to the processes we do on a regular basis. One of those things-whether you are a type A personality or not-is having a very strong routine from day to day. I once explained my job to my wife after she complained that she was not able to "get any work done for herself" at her corporate job because of all of the meetings she had that day. Basically, teaching-depending upon the schedule-is basically having five hour-long meetings with 20 or 30 individuals with topics ranging everywhere from agricultural mechanics, to livestock nutrition and everywhere in between each and every day. There are five minute breaks in between the meetings and you have 25 minutes for lunch.

It is safe to say that as teachers, we are pretty used to having a routine. We should embrace this

plan to fail”. At the same time, we have all heard our fellow teachers complain about how exhausting the summer is with all the commitments and no time for rest and relaxation. Point being: If you want to capitalize on recharging, you really need to plan some events that facilitate that need. Whether that be touring a historical site near

**First and foremost, the number one thing on your plate should be to recharge. Recharging means different things to different people.**

you with a friend, attending a concert, having a lazy day on the river or a lake or spending time on the family farm with your family and cattle (what my co-teacher calls bovine rehabilitation); if you are to do it, then you must plan it. Set aside time for yourself. That’s#1 on this list of mine for a reason. If you skip this one, you will be operating without a full tank of fuel and there’s a good chance you won’t be satisfied with the quality or the quantity of the items on your list.

The second step to beating the summertime blues is to reflect upon your year. Just like the list of goals for the summer, dumping a massive list of things to do can get you quickly overwhelmed. It is best to compartmentalize the areas of reflection so that your reflection is more targeted and productive. For this, I strongly encourage that you reflect on the three separate parts of agriculture education: SAE, FFA, and Classroom Instruction.

In each of these instances, take half of an afternoon and look at them all intently, one at a time. What worked in the past year? What did not work in the past year? In the case of SAE, your goals may revolve around proficiencies, SAE visits or number of students in your program with a functional SAE. Maybe you were not satisfied with your

incorporation of SAE’s in your classroom instruction or maybe you have goals of having the SAE

grants completed by students in your classes. Concerning FFA, it may be fundraisers, contests, community service events or providing structure and function for your executive team. Perhaps your goal for the year is for it be a lot like last year. Maybe your goals revolve around this year NOT being like last year. On the curriculum and instruction side of things, I like to get out my pacing guide and go unit by unit, considering what changes need to take place in each unit along the way. One of the best resources I have for this is a feedback sheet for our state accountability assessment for agriculture. On this document, I am able to see where my students ex-

celled and where my curriculum failed them. It makes it much easier to target areas for improvement. To facilitate any of this, I am a big fan of journaling. In middle school, we were all taught to pre-write before we wrote anything on paper. For me, reflection in any form is the pre-writing for our lives. Point being: Try to put your reflection on paper rather than all in your head.

Finally, the last step is to renew. When I look at renewal, I know that the first two steps of Refresh and Reflect must take place prior. The dread I was referencing earlier that some teachers feel at the beginning of summer is a direct product of teachers not taking time to refresh and reflect before they feel they need to “fix” everything they messed up on from last year.

Renewal can be facilitated many ways, I find the best way is to interact with others who face the same challenges I do, but deal with them much more successfully. My first year of teaching, I was in charge of the greenhouse and I spent many hours at the local greenhouse talking to the manager, trying to get an idea of what sold well and how I could grow it in my greenhouse. When I had a change in my job, I also

**To think that we can renew ourselves or our crafts without taking time to refresh and reflect, is the same as planting a garden without taking a soil sample, buying cattle without having land, or placing the proverbial cart before the proverbial horse.**

had a change in preps and realized I would be teaching shop classes—a class I had never taught. What did I do with this challenge that set before me? I went and spent two days with some of the best shop teachers in our state and pelted them with curriculum questions and one was kind enough to let me disassemble and reassemble an engine under his guidance. I left these meetings with tons of confidence and steepened my learning curve much more than if I had tried trial and error.

Ultimately, renewal is what we need from summer. We desire to improve ourselves and produce pur-

poseful plans for the year ahead. To think that we can renew ourselves or our crafts without taking time to refresh and reflect, is the same as planting a garden without taking a soil sample, buying cattle without having land, or placing the proverbial cart before the proverbial horse.

This summer, make sure that you beat the summertime blues by making a list of priorities. Make sure that list has time for a personalized Refresh, some targeted Reflection and a productive Renewal are at the top of the list.



*Samuel Evans is currently the agricultural educator at Franklin-Simpson High School in Franklin, KY. He spends most of his free time with his wife and 2-year-old son. He enjoys creating artwork out of tobacco sticks and reclaimed bourbon barrels in order to refresh, rejuvenate, and renew.*

*“Chase Away...” continued from page 11*

for opportunities to teach abroad! Organizations like Farmer to Farmer are looking for agricultural experts to travel abroad and teach various agricultural practices to communities in need. Who better to do this than an agriculture teacher? This type of program allows us to embark upon a unique service learning opportunity from which we can develop both personally and professionally.

Once we’ve identified and attended the professional development event which best suits our needs, the final step is to create a plan to implement what we’ve learned in our daily practice for the coming year. Think back to our goals. What did we want to achieve? Now, how can we translate our learning into action steps in our classrooms? Create goals for the implementation of our professional development, being sure to

include target dates for our goals to be achieved.

Regardless of the avenue we take to improve ourselves as educators this summer, one thing remains true: professional development can cure those summer time blues by providing us the opportunity to reflect upon our weaknesses, address the issue, and develop a plan to become an even better educator for our students. By engaging in professional development this summer, we will not only improve our practices, but also refill our motivation and excitement for the coming year so that we can better serve our students.

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# *A Framework for Implementing Learning Outcome Assessment (LOA) in Agricultural Education Programs*

by Rama Radhakrishna and John Ewing

Colleges and universities across the United States have been asked to conduct program assessments at levels—undergraduate and graduate as part of the accreditation process and secondary agricultural programs have simi-

Learning objectives are brief, clear, and concise statements that describe the “intended” learning outcomes of instruction. You come across three types of learning objectives based on Bloom’s classification of learning domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective.

Cognitive Objectives (Knowl-

The specific objective may be to improve the health and wellness of Pennsylvania citizens through a wellness program. Both goals and objectives use the language of outcomes. The characteristic that distinguishes goals and objectives is the level of specificity as described in the above examples.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes describe what students are expected to demonstrate and describes what students are able to demonstrate in terms of knowledge, skills, and values upon completion of a course or courses or a degree program (Osters & Tiu, 2008; Suskie, 2009).

Learning outcomes describe what students should know, be able to do and value by the end of their educational program. Outcomes are “achieved” results or consequences of what was learned; i.e., evidence that learning took place. A well-articulated learning outcome serves as a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching learning process. Four general dimensions of learning outcomes are commonly identified:

Knowledge outcomes pertain

Learning objectives are brief, clear, and concise statements that describe the “intended” learning outcomes of instruction.

larreview processes. Regardless of the levels, programs are to develop program-level learning objectives, outcomes assessments, and program improvement plans. In addition, programs must document evidence of formal assessment measures and show that data from such assessments are used for program improvement. In this article we discuss the importance of learning outcome assessments (LOA), processes that could be used to implement LOA in both secondary and post-secondary agricultural education programs. We also share an example of a program that used several LOA processes: writing learning objectives and outcomes, selecting assessment methods, and developing rubrics to measure outcomes.

## **Learning Objectives**

edge): What do you want your students to know?

Psychomotor Objectives (Skills): What do you want your students to be able to do?

Affective Objectives (Attitude): What do you want your students to think or care about?

Objectives must be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and trackable.

Are goals and objectives same? The answer is No. Goals are broader and express outcomes in general terms, while objectives are specific. For example, a goal may be to improve the quality of life of Pennsylvania citizens.

Objectives must be SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and trackable.

to students' comprehension of fundamental cognitive content, core concepts or questions, basic principles of inquiry, broad history and/or varied disciplinary techniques

Skills outcomes focus on capacity for applying basic knowledge, analyzing and synthesizing information, assessing the value of information, communicating effectively, and collaborating.

Attitudes and values outcomes encompass affective states, personal/professional/social values, and ethical principles.

Behavioral outcomes reflect a manifestation of knowledge, skills, attitudes as evidenced by performance, contributions, etc.

Three essential components of Learning Outcomes:

1. Student learning behavior (what you expect students do in the program/course).

2. Appropriate assessment methods (what information will be provided).

3. Criteria for success (student performance criteria-how do you know it is successful).

When writing measurable Learning Outcomes, it is important to:

1. Focus on student behavior – This refers to what students are able to demonstrate by completing a course(s) or a program.
2. Use simple action verbs to focus on expected student outcomes. Examples of action verbs include: collect, analyze, demonstrate, apply, use, evaluate, articulate, appreciate, etc. Bloom's Taxonomy can be a useful resource in devel-

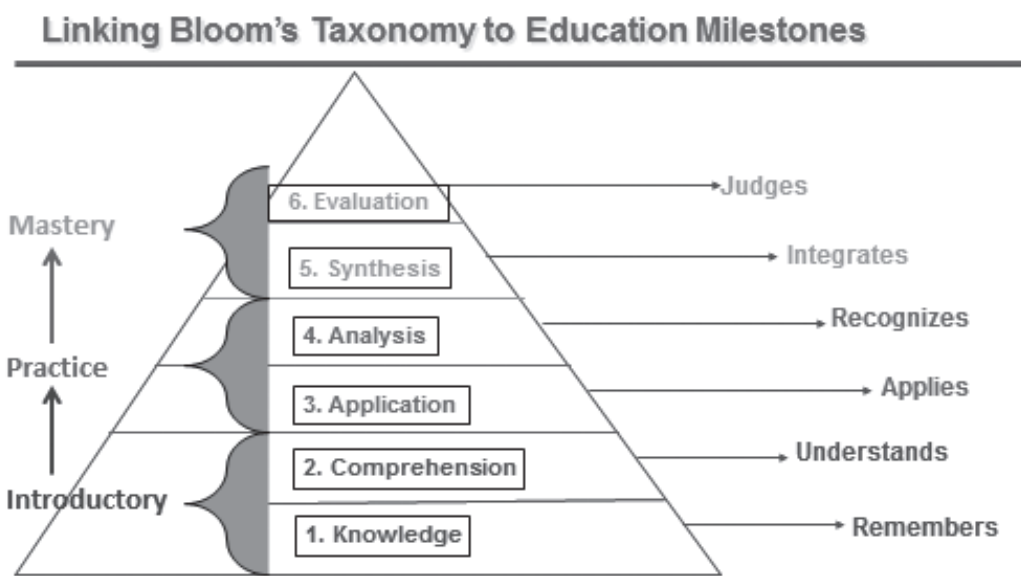
oping learning outcomes relative to knowledge, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning.

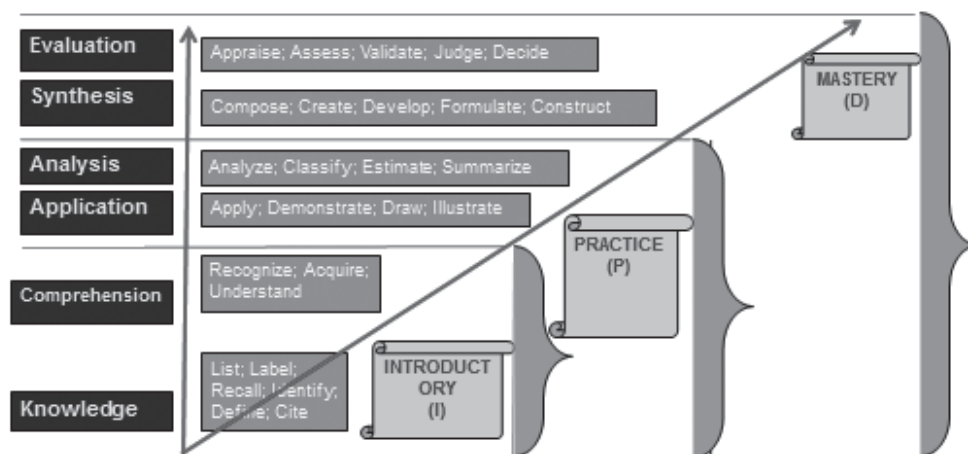
a. Graduates in the AEE program will be able to evaluate educational research critically and participate in research projects.

b. Graduates in the INTAD program will be able to articulate the social, economic, and cultural differences and the importance of these differences in poverty alleviation programs.

3. Select appropriate assessment methods. Assessment methods are tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which the stated learning outcomes are achieved. Assessment methods can be direct, indirect, quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both (mixed methods).

Figure 1





**Linking Bloom's Taxonomy to Graduate Education Phases/Milestones**

Figure 2

- Select desired performance criteria. This helps you determine what is success in a course or a program? Think of letter grades as criteria for success. 95% or above = A, 90-94% = A-, 85-89 = B+, etc.

To familiarize with the LOA processes, we used two frameworks—Bloom's Taxonomy and Education Milestones (See Figures 1 and 2). We linked the 6 levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) to three Milestones (Introductory, Practice, and Mastery). Understanding these frameworks and connecting them to outcomes was critical to developing LOA plans. These frameworks allow educators to assess levels of learning desired by their students in each course. Teachers can determine which level of cognition is desired at a particular point in a specific course or the overall program.

### Summary

Assessment methods are tools and techniques used to determine the extent to which the stated learning outcomes are achieved. Assessment methods can be direct or indirect, qualitative or quantitative or both. By utilizing the information outlined in this article, teachers can develop their own learning outcome assessments that meet the needs of the scope and sequence within their agricultural education program.



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# Guat's Up in Ag Ed: A Case Study of Agricultural Education in Guatemala

by Melanie Miller Foster, Daniel Foster and Duverney Chaverra Rodriguez

**S**ololá, Guatemala - We teach our students that agriculture is global – that different growing contexts can produce different agricultural products that are sold on the global market. But do we ever think about agricultural education in other contexts? How is agriculture taught to the next generation in different parts of the world? What is the same and what is different?



*The Global Teach Ag team with Oscar Ivan Yac, a brand new teacher*

A recent project with the United States Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agriculture Service brought us to Universidad del Valle de Guatemala Altiplano in the western highlands of Guatemala. The institutional story is fascinating: the grounds currently being

used as an institution of learning previously served as a military base during the civil war that took place from 1960 to 1996. During the conflict, indigenous Maya were targeted and thousands of men, women and children were killed. When the conflict ended the military base was converted to a branch campus of Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG), a symbolically beautiful act.

In Guatemala access to education is very limited. The only free public education in Guatemala, and in many parts of the world, is primary education. In spite of this, UVG Altiplano provides the region with access to educational opportunities spanning from sixth grade to engineering degrees. The western highlands, where UVG Altiplano is located, has high rates of illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition. Additionally, the local population is largely indigenous, meaning that the population has been marginalized in many forms for hundreds of years. In many ways, the students flooding onto the school grounds each day is in itself a miraculous act.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has made many investments in UVG Altiplano to support research, education and extension. For example, the science lab, the library and many classrooms have signs that thank the American people for supporting the construction and equipment contained in the various facilities.

The greenhouses also have these signs, and inside each greenhouse research projects are conducted between UVG faculty and USDA. Additionally, USDA sponsors extension efforts such as workshops for farmers to learn about new practices and technologies. Why does the USDA support these efforts? Simply put, it is a matter of supporting global food security. We know that as the population grows, each country in the world needs to increase agricultural production in order to meet the growing demand. The USDA supports countries that have great agricultural potential, but are not yet producing at their capacity. Additionally, the United States imports agricultural products from Guatemala. Did you know that about 80% of the snow peas consumed in the U.S. are grown in Guatemala?

The PSU Global Teach Ag! Initiative (@GlobalTeachAg) was developed to assist agricultural educators in the U.S. and across the world have high quality global



*Dr. Foster participates in a cooperative group activity*

learning engagement opportunities (learn more at: <http://aese.psu.edu/teachag/global>). This particular Penn State project team included Global Learning Specialist, Melanie Miller Foster (@GlobalMelanie), Latin-American Specialist, Duverney Chaverra Rodriguez (@duverneydj) and Innovation Specialist, Daniel Foster (@FosterDanielD). With a hope towards institutional paradigm shifts, the scope of work for the two-week on-site visit included classroom observation, individual faculty interviews, differentiated professional development for each faculty member through the creation of individual professional development plans. We also developed and conducted group professional development instruction highlighting strategies for increasing instructional variability. It was truly our goal to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” mentality.

The #GlobalTeachAg team conducted classroom observations of 20 different faculty members. During this time, we had the privilege to observe master teachers and brand new instructors. In our observations, we found passionate individuals who care deeply about student success and respectful students eager to engage in various aspects of agricultural education. The classrooms were largely bare, containing the essentials such as desks for the students and teacher, a whiteboard and a TV screen. It was clear from the beginning that the students and their teachers prefer to be outside conducting practicums, working and truly “learning by doing” in one of the several on-campus agriculture facilities.

Several teachers were successfully able to combine “the theory”

and “the practical”. (These are the two designed components of curriculum as identified by U.V.G. faculty.) An interesting scenario occurred on the first Wednesday afternoon on campus. The #GlobalTeachAg team was dragging, tired and sleepy and wondering why we were assigned to observe a three-hour statistics class. We quietly complained to each other that we were here to observe agriculture classes, not other subjects...we had no idea we were about to have our own conceptions of applied academic integration through career and technical education tested!



*Mr. Bulux's statistics class excavates the sub-plots*

A smiling, confident teacher strode into the room. It was indeed our pleasure to meet Mr. Arnoldo Bulux. After a purposeful review of the material from the previous class session, he explained the current day's learning objectives. To our surprise after structuring the learning plan and before we as observers knew what was happening, Mr. Bulux swept everyone out of the room and onto the nearby soccer field, where he played a quick game to divide the students into pairs. Once paired, we followed eager students to the

experimental plot where students had propagated ornamental plants in different soil treatments the week before. It should be noted at this time that in addition to being the applied statistics instructor, Mr. Bulux is also the plant pathology instructor. The students were artfully guided in restating experimental design with the plotting of different treatments and control. Each pair of students was assigned a subplot where they were instructed to dig up the plants and count the number of roots that had sprouted, and then record the data in their notebooks. Once the data was captured, the students returned to the classroom.

In the classroom, students played hot potato with a pinecone for the privilege of writing their results on the board. After all the results were accounted for, students worked in pairs to determine if the results were statistically significant between treatments.

We were sorry that we had to leave to observe another class, but were easily able to sneak out while the students were quietly working...but think about this: students were engaged, having fun and excited to learn STATISTICS. They were eager to take the mathematical concepts and apply to the data they collected in a context that matters to them and their lives: agriculture.

Mr. Bulux's statistics class was not only a great example of the combination of “theory” and “practical”, but also example of teaching in a difficult environment. In a learning environment where



photocopies are hard to come by, teachers supply their own white-board markers and erasers, and the satellite wireless internet blinks out whenever a cloud crosses the sky, Mr. Bulux was able to use the available resources to his advantage. We learned that he takes advantage of every possible professional development opportunity, even to the point of seeking out opportunity for involvement in a local teaching community of practice. We should note that Mr. Bulux does not have a structure of a



*A sign posted outside of the science lab*

professional organization like the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) for U.S. school-based agriculture teachers. In addition, most professional development he engages in as an instructor is done on his own time, of his own volition. If he misses class time, he has to “make up” that time with students at a later time. Finally, even passionate, dedicated teachers like Mr. Bulux are not afforded the opportunity to be “full-time” agriculture teachers: a livable wage is not available. Nearly all of the instructors we talked with at UVG Altiplano work another job (two!) and/or have a side business. This brought to the forefront of our minds the blessing we have of a recognized professional teaching workforce as full-time dedicated public servants in the U. S.

The students also face many hardships as well. We noticed a wide variety of ages in a single classroom. When we asked why, we found that many students struggle to pay the modest school fees. In many cases, students drop out of school in order to work, and then re-enroll when they have the ability to pay for another semester of tuition. There was also limited representation of female students and female teachers. Simply put, it’s hard to be a female of any age in Guatemala. For example, girls are typically the last of the family members to eat, which is why they face higher rates of malnutrition and stunting than boys. When it comes to education, many families choose to invest in boys, rather than girls. More broadly, Guatemala is one of the most violent countries of women in the world, and has the third highest rate of femicide. All these reasons potentially contribute to the explanation of why we saw so few female students and teachers at UVG Altiplano.

When traveling abroad, it is always tempting to look for what’s different, but we prefer to look for similarities. What we saw at UVG Altiplano included enthusiastic, creative teachers of agriculture educating the next generation of leaders in agriculture. Although the context is very unique, the passion for agriculture is the same.

We look forward to continuing to build institutional relationships and personal individual relationships with our friends in Guatemala. An underlying core value of the PSU Global TeachAg! Initiative is that you can change the world, but you do it with one student, one

teacher, one school, and one community at a time. If you are personally interested in being involved, or in developing global engagement opportunities (either virtually or otherwise) for your students, program and community, please let us know by emailing us your vision and aspiration to [teachag@psu.edu](mailto:teachag@psu.edu)! We see and hear of so many purposeful, meaningful opportunities where we hope to connect the great agriculture teachers and programs of the United States to global partners which we believe ends in everything have a positive learning experience.



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*Daniel D. Foster is the Innovation Specialist for the PSU Global Teach Ag! Initiative.*

*Duverney Chaverra Rodriguez is a Ph.D. candidate in Entomology at The Pennsylvania State University.*

*Also pictured, Raymundo Mardoqueo Velasquez who teaches mathematical modeling at UVG.*

## Bright Beginnings

by Laura Sankey Rice

Starting a new school year is both exhilarating and exhausting. Regardless of one's background and accomplishments, the first days of a new school year can be overwhelming. Teaching high school agriculture education can and will test your preparation, perse-

**Being an agriculture educator is far more than a job, a duty, or a paycheck. It is a calling.**

verance, and passion. Being an agriculture educator is far more than a job, a duty, or a paycheck. It is a calling. You have the opportunity to watch students grow and develop intellectually by integrating dynamic instruction while developing youth voice and agency through student organizations, as well as, an entrepreneurial spirit and financial literacy through work-based learning. Our work is substantial, but incredibly rewarding.

The first days of school often sets the tone for the rest of the year. The start of a new school year is a blank page, a fresh start. The opportunity is present to embark on a new journey head on, with optimism and vigor. In this article, you will find tips and strategies you can practice to cultivate a learning environment that is purposeful, impactful, and engaging! Beat those sum-

mer time blues by approaching the new school year with a renewed outlook on teaching and learning!

Have clear goals and a big vision for your teaching, students, and program. Students will make dramatic academic progress when, from the very beginning, teachers develop a clear, ambitious vision of success. By examining personal beliefs and goals and creating a vision, you clarify where you are headed so that you can efficiently design how to get there. Know exactly where you want your teaching, students, and program to be by the end of the year and realize that a bold (and some might say

**Celebrating students' successes contributes to an overall positive school experience. Students will become successful through efforts in perseverance, commitment, and hard work. Honor students' efforts by celebrating their successes no matter how small or infrequent.**

crazy) vision of success can actually drive student achievement. Make your goals big, powerful, measurable, ambitious, and meaningful!

In teaching, your effectiveness does not always depend on your own efforts alone. It depends on how well you support and motivate your students. Use students' strengths in knowledge and behavior to help them learn.

Students are more likely to pay attention and be excited about the content your teaching when they view the class as relevant to themselves and connected to their interests. Maximize student interest and excitement by using a bottom-up approach that involves assessing students' needs, tailoring the class experience, and using teaching techniques that purposefully increase students' engagement.

Create classroom policies and procedures. Classroom management and student behavior can often times be a big concern for teachers. Establishing a well-managed classroom is what every teacher desires. Opening lines of communication and establishing clear expectations and guidelines are essential to classroom man-

agement. Effective communication at any grade level means clearly posting your expectations and verbalizing them over and over again. Encourage your students to collectively come up with a list of rules as well. Research has shown that when students share in the rulemaking they tend to follow them and hopefully, a lot of the rules that they brainstorm will mirror your own.



Celebrating students' successes contributes to an overall positive school experience. Students will become successful through efforts in perseverance, commitment, and hard work. Honor students' efforts by celebrating their successes no matter how small or infrequent. The key to using celebrations to influence student motivation is ensuring that you recognize the effort that went into

your own. Extend your learning by developing an online professional learning network (PLNs). Building a professional learning network can help you connect with other teachers, collect information, resources, seek feedback, reflect, and find collaboration opportunities. Continue to learn and grow every day!

Teachers of all ages and experience levels are critical to the

Every teacher has their own specialized needs when it comes to professional growth and development. Engaging in timely, relevant, and purposeful professional development may require you to be proactive, reach out, and design your own.

the achieved goal, not only the achievement itself. When you recognize and discuss the student's effort, the celebration becomes an internal motivator for students, instead of celebrating the achievement only—like 100 percent quiz score—with the reward of a candy bar.

Teaching and learning is complex. Highly effective teachers are continually developing their craft through collaboration, professional development, and studying pedagogical techniques and best practices. In order to stay informed of the most current education research, it is critical for teachers to seek these opportunities. Every teacher has their own specialized needs when it comes to professional growth and development. Engaging in timely, relevant, and purposeful professional development may require you to be proactive, reach out, and design

growth and development of students. We can all use a reminder of the simple things that can have a big impact on our teaching, students, and programs. I am sure you have experienced the transformational power of an effective teacher. A teacher who made school an exciting and interesting place, and possessed a passion for the subjects they taught and genuinely cared for their students. You too have that transformational power. My hope is this article has ignited a fire within, to shake those summer blues, and look to the school year with excitement and see the bright beginnings it holds! Good luck!

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