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Facilitating Difficult Conversations

Fostering Growth Through Difficult Conversations

by Gaea Hock

Do you have a minute? When I hear this question from a person of authority, I still get a quickening in my chest and do a quick reflection on what I might have done to cause this question to be asked.

Having a difficult conversation is never something I look forward having, but there are times when it is necessary for growth and progress. When I think about the difficult conversations I have had, both personally and professionally, I reflect on how I could have been conducted them in a more effective manner.

According to Judy Ringer's article, "We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations" the first step is preparing ourselves for the conversation. Consider what you hope to accomplish and the overall purpose for the discussion before you begin. We also have to try to limit our emotions so we do not say things we will later regret or will distract from the goal of the conversation. Try to limit our assumptions as to how the other individual feels/believes and keep our attitude as positive as possible as we prepare to meet with the individual. This first step involves a great amount of self-reflection and being honest about the situation in need of discussion.

The article by Ringer also outlines four steps to a successful outcome.

Step 1: Inquiry – Ask questions and listen without interrupting. This phase is all about learning. She encourages us to learn as

much as possible about the beliefs and viewpoints of the other person.

Step 2: Acknowledgement – Be open and honest about acknowledging what was said and how you are interpreting the statements. Do not outwardly agree, but rather recognize them as important and justifiable.

Step 3: Advocacy – After the other person has finished, it is your turn to state what you understand and clarify your own position.

Step 4: Problem-Solving – Together brainstorm possible solutions to the situation. Use ideas from both parties to create a collaborative resolution.

If at any time the conversation becomes argumentative, she encourages us to start the process over again. The only way to improve and grow is through continual practice and reflection. Using the steps above will assist us in developing the skills necessary to advance initiatives and support change.

I hope you will take the time to read and reflect on the articles contained on this issue. There are personal testimonies of difficult conversations they have had as an agriculture student and teacher. Consider how you would support the young people in your program who may be faced with difficult situations each day. Also included is an article detailing a different method you can use to facilitate a difficult conversation that I teach my preservice teachers each fall. Finally, you will learn more about the work being done by National FFA and NAAE to address inclusion, diversity and equity.

Reference

Ringer, J. (n.d.) *We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations*. Retrieved from <https://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-step-by-step-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>



*Dr. Gaea Hock is an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education at Kansas State University and Editor of **The Agricultural Education Magazine**.*

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Bettering Our Programs Through Difficult Conversations

by Carla Jagger

As agriculture teachers, we are constantly engaged in conversations. Most of the time we don't have to think twice about the conversation we're having, however there is that occasional conversation that we might dread having or realize after the fact that we could have handled the situation better. With these latter conversations in mind, I am so pleased to bring you this magazine theme surrounding the idea of facilitating difficult conversations. It is my hope that these articles will help us all better serve our students and communities through engaging in purposeful, authentic, and maybe even difficult, conversations. It is only through conversations that we can begin to make a positive difference in each other's lives.

When I think back to the beginning of my career as an agriculture teacher there were plenty of things I was not prepared for and still find myself occasionally struggling through. Facilitating difficult conversations is one of those areas. Although my experiences navigating difficult, student, parent, and/or administrator conversations were limited while teaching, it didn't make any of those situations easier. From talking parents down to defending our positions, or helping mold students into productive citizens and future leaders, we constantly facilitate difficult and authentic conversations. The curated articles for this magazine issue will hopefully help those of us still struggling through these conversations or possibly give some of us new strategies to incorporate.

To begin this issue, one of our fellow teachers will highlight all the audiences she tends to work with, helping to lay the groundwork for the remaining articles of the issue. The majority of articles curated focus on diversity and inclusion of our local programs and even look at the national level. Additionally, other teachers will share their personal experiences either while teaching or even as they were students coming up through agricultural education. I also intentionally wanted to hear from our current students, so with the help of several agriculture teachers across the country, you'll also see some insightful perspectives from our high school students surrounding conversations. I hope this article in particular will help spark conversations on how we can better engage our students in conversations, and maybe even allow them more freedom to engage in meaningful conversations with our local communities. You'll see that some of the conversations they would like to have more often are related to advocating for agriculture. In addition to these stories, you'll also be able to gain some practical applications when facilitating conversations in a few different ways.

As you read through these articles remember we always have room to grow professionally and personally. As we continue to interact with new audiences or encounter new situations with our close-knit communities, we need to remember the situations and strategies discussed in these articles. Hopefully each of you will be able to implement these

ideas to successfully navigate your difficult and authentic conversations. We all must strive to be and do better as influential teachers and leaders within our communities. Implementing some of these strategies will hopefully help us engage with new and existing populations to better our whole programs. I certainly hope you enjoy this issue and I also hope it leads to deeper, more authentic conversations within the broad agricultural education field.



Carla Jagger is an Assistant Professor at Mississippi State University where she helps train pre-service agricultural education teachers. Prior to this role she taught at a high school agriculture program in Ohio for three years. She has been part of the agriculture education community since 2004 in some way starting as a student working all the way through now preparing future teachers.

The Many Audiences We Encounter Every Day

by Lana Myers

To someone looking into our daily lives as educators, they may think that the audience we deal the most with is our own students: the students who are enrolled in our Agriscience courses and sit in our classroom each and every day. As a college student preparing myself for my future career, I had these same thoughts; however, after my semester student teaching and then becoming an Agriscience instructor in my own classroom, I soon realized that no matter how great of a teacher I was, the success of my students and my chapter depended on the relationships that were formed with those individuals that never would gain a grade or credit in my classroom. I have realized that the time spent nurturing and growing these relationships eases my workload and has allowed my students and chapter to reach heights that I never thought were possible as a beginning educator. I learned that there are no set standards found in a curriculum guide on ways to build these relationships and that it may differ based on the teacher, chapter size, and location of the chapter, but it is my hope to fill you in on some of the strategies that have benefited my chapter and students.

Even though I stated earlier that our relationship with our students was only a small part of the total puzzle, it is most certainly the foundation to a successful Agriscience program. As a college student, I was told on numerous occasions that students will do their absolute best if they know their teacher cares about them. As an Agriscience instructor, we are

placed in a position different from other teachers: we interact with our students at community service events, career development event practices, livestock shows, and fundraisers. We see them in

action can make a huge difference in their behavior in our classroom and their willingness to give their all as FFA members. I realize that many of our students are not athletes, and you may be wondering

I soon realized that no matter how great of a teacher I was, the success of my students and my chapter depended on the relationships that were formed with those individuals that never would gain a grade or credit in my classroom.

their daily lives outside of school and witness the joys and struggles they face. We meet their families and see a glimpse of what truly makes them who they are. We are introduced to their fears of public speaking as they say the FFA Creed as a timid freshman, then watch them give their retiring address as a senior officer at their final chapter banquet. We see them grow to become the person that they never knew existed, and we are fortunate enough to be a part of this growth.

The best way to form this relationship with each student we teach is to find out what their interests are and to show some interest. For example, if they are an athlete, go to their football game, basketball game, or track meet and support them. The next time you see them at recess or in the lunch line, comment on the positive play they made and encourage them to continue working hard in their sport. Many of our students don't get this encouragement from home, and this small inter-

how to show them they too play an important role. It may be as simple as having the student who has a job at the local meat market help train your meat identification team, or having the student who knows a lot about computers assist your reporter with creating the slide show presentation for your Greenhand recruitment event. It does not have to be a huge time consuming task; it only needs to show the student you trust their skills and value them as an important part of your Agriscience program. The more students you include, the stronger your chapter will become. Not only will this help you as the advisor, but it will also help your officer team,



as it lessens the burden placed on them as more members are willing to serve as leaders even though they do not have the officer title.

Another audience that can help or hinder your program is your counselor/administration. These individuals play a significant role in your class scheduling and the students in your classes. Your counselor meets with every student in your school and is aware of their future career plans. The counselor knows what courses are available each hour and can direct students on which courses fit best into their academic plan. Many times the counselor may not have taken Agriscience themselves or be aware of the benefits students can gain, so it is up to us as the instructor to relay this information to them. The best way to do this is to invite your counselor and administration to your chapter meeting, social, or banquet so they can watch your students perform opening ceremonies. Invite them to serve as a judge at your invitational leadership development event so they witness firsthand the rigor our students meet. You can also volunteer to serve as a chaperone for the Career Fair showing that you are genuinely concerned about your students' success even after they graduate. Building a relationship with your counselor and administration is one of the integral components in maintaining a successful program. They can be your greatest advocates and can help solve possible problems with students or parents.

Your fellow teachers are an audience you interact with on a daily basis. I have heard horror stories from fellow Agriscience teachers on how some teachers badmouth their program. The best way to

prevent this from happening is to ensure all teachers understand it takes a village to raise a child. I have strict standards my students must follow in order to attend CDE trips or community service projects: they must have passing grades in all courses and no discipline referrals. By following this standard, my fellow teachers understand that I value their coursework, as well as the entire student, not just how they act in my classroom. I have also had my state winning teams in Parliamentary Procedure and Conduct of Chapter Meetings demonstrate to our school faculty and student body so that they witness what is going on in my program. These team members also host parliamentary procedure trainings for our junior high clubs, which not only gets them important practice but serves as a great recruitment tool.

Parents/guardians are another audience we encounter as Agriscience instructors. In my teaching situation, I have taught multiple siblings from the same family throughout my 15 years teaching. Most times these students are encouraged at home to take my Agriscience course because their big brother or sister took me beforehand. I have learned that communicating with parents/guardians about their child's good and bad behaviors is necessary to form that teacher/parent relationship. Parents/guardians want their kids to succeed and do better than they did. Agriscience and the FFA offers an avenue for this success to occur. The biggest lesson that I have learned is that most parents/guardians are willing to help out, you just have to ask. Whether it is baking items for a fundraiser, serving as a chaperone for nation-

al convention, or training a CDE team, one of the greatest assets of knowledge at our fingertips are the parents/guardians of our members.

The final audience we encounter is community members. We interact with them on a daily basis, so we must make sure that this interaction is a positive one. These community members may not have current students in our program, however, they may be FFA alumni who are willing and able to provide financial support for our program. Additionally, they may have the knowledge and skills to serve as CDE/LDE trainers for our teams, allowing single-teacher departments, like myself, the opportunity to train many more teams and conduct more community service projects than would be possible by myself. A community that embraces an FFA program can be the single biggest factor in maintaining the success of the chapter. My time as an educator has taught me the importance of showing gratitude to these community members who support the program. Whether that means a simple "thanks" or a written thank-you note from your members, nothing has a greater impact on community members continually supporting your chap-



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ter than the knowledge that they are genuinely making a difference for your students and for you.

I hope I have given some insight into ways to build relationships with the different audiences



you will encounter as an Agriscience instructor. Each of these audiences play a role in our lives as educators. We must embrace each group and not be afraid to let them play their part in building our programs to new and better heights.

Remember, that a chapter is only as strong as its individual members and an instructor is only as strong as their individual students. It takes everyone working together for our students, chapter, and communities to thrive.



Lana Myers is the Agriscience Instructor/FFA Advisor at Elton High School in Elton, Louisiana and has taught Agricultural Education for 15 years. The Elton FFA chapter was named a 2019 Premier Finalist in Building Communities as a part of the national chapter program. Elton FFA is also home to the 2018 National Champion Team in Conduct of Chapter Meetings.

THEME ARTICLE

Creating Seats at the Table for Everyone

by Lauren Fillebrown

We all have special moments and memories we always remember... These memories and moments help us remember people, places, and things that changed or impacted us. Three of my biggest moments were getting my driver's license, getting elected to a state FFA officer position, and the summer internship I had my senior year of college. Many of us might realize the significance of getting our driver's license and getting elected to state FFA office, but some of you may be interested to know why the summer internship I had my senior year of college was so memorable. It was that summer

and the experiences and people I met that really challenged me and helped broaden my perspectives on issues specifically surrounding inclusion and diversity.

During the summer of 2017, I had the awesome opportunity to work on one of the country's largest urban farms serving as full-time farm staff and learning more about the city's need for urban agriculture and community involvement. Throughout the summer, I got the opportunity to work in the fields with different crops, engage with community members at the CSA/Farmer's Market and hear from different student workers about their experiences.

The first day of my internship really set the mood for the rest of my summer. When I arrived, I toured the facilities and was introduced to several of the staff and teachers who worked at the partner school nearby. As I was being introduced to one teacher, he shared with me that he was happy to see me working at this farm and mentioned that, "we [the school and farm] need more people like you around." I instantly agreed with him, thinking that he was talking about having young people in agriculture working at the facilities. But that teacher looked at me... and with a smile on his face he said, "I'm going to be brutally honest. We need people of color,

just like you, in the classrooms and out on the farm. You are the first colored person these students have seen working on the farm.” My eyes opened very wide... I didn’t know how to respond at first. I smiled back and agreed with his statement although I don’t think I fully agreed until the conclusion of my summer internship.

The rest of the summer, more stories like the one on my first day continued to happen. Every Monday and Friday I would help out at the Farmer’s Market/CSA talking with community members and helping them find the right items. Several times, many customers would come up to me speaking in Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic asking questions about unique food options. For instance, one customer (who I think was from Turkey) came up wanting to know if we sold chicken. I shared with him that we did and I pointed to them in the freezer. And he looked at me and said, “No... I would like

live chicken.” Unfortunately, we did not sell live chicken, but we were able to send him to a farm nearby that did. However, this interaction along with a few others made me realize that some cultures have customs that are far different from the typical United States culture, and that as producers we need to be aware of this.

One of the last experiences comes from my interactions with one of the student interns who I had the awesome pleasure of mentoring throughout the summer. Over the summer I noticed it was very strange to the other workers, who had been at the farm for a long time, that this student connected and wanted to shadow me much more than the other workers. One day, the student indirectly explained why, after she asked me what “mix” I was (referring to my hereditary makeup), and why I wanted to farm. As we got talking, she shared that there are barely any teachers who are teachers of color at her school. She didn’t necessarily feel unwelcomed, but she questioned why would she want to go into a career in agriculture when all she sees are white people in the career. We spent a lot of time talking about this, and I gained so much from her perspective on inclusivity and what it truly means to encourage those of di-



verse backgrounds to join in. And this is how that summer changed and challenged my perspective, and has forever changed my life.

The question I formed after that summer internship is: ‘why is there a struggle to connect with those who are diverse in the agricultural industry?’ What is the agricultural industry and specifically Agricultural Education doing that feels unwelcoming? Are we encouraging all students and community members to get involved? I honestly don’t feel like Ag Ed is sometimes. I know from my experience in Ag Ed and FFA, there were quite a few times when I felt left out and misplaced. I wanted a seat at the table just like everyone else, and it was hard when I didn’t look like all the people who were around me. And this goes so much deeper than just external diversity, but also diversity of thought, upbringing, socio-economic status, ability, and so much more. However, because specific mentors and teachers valued my uniqueness and invested in me (and still do to this day), I have pursued opportunities that I never knew



I had. As we appreciate diversity through being intentionally inclusive, we open doors for students that they never even knew they had. I am a living product of that.

Fast forward from my summer internship to a few months later, I had the opportunity to fill in as an agricultural educator at my hometown high school as the previous teacher was on maternity leave. It was in this role I saw first-hand the things I experienced during my summer internship. The previous teacher in this role was a very caring, kind, and compassionate white female teacher who would check in every week to see how I was doing. I would share that certain students would be attending FFA events and were very engaged in class, and she would sometimes be shocked at this. As I thought about our discussions deeper, it clicked in my head. Most of the students who were previously not engaged in class or at external events but now were, as I was teaching, were students of color and from diverse, ethnic backgrounds. I want to

point out that the previous teacher didn't do anything wrong. She deeply cared for the students and wanted to see the best for them. But for once these students saw themselves in their teacher and could identify on a deeper level with the subject material making it more real for them to make a connection to their future selves.

Specifically, when thinking about Agricultural Education, I have heard many minority students share that they never considered pursuing a career in teaching because they were mostly taught by white educators throughout the K-12 system and really don't identify with the teaching profession. Growing up in a somewhat rural area, I can agree that almost all of my teachers were predominantly white and that while I didn't inherently have those thoughts, I did, I unconsciously was thinking that way. Did that stop me from pursuing my dreams? No, but it definitely is something to think about.

As agricultural educators, we need to show compassion and care

for students so they too feel like they have a seat at the table even when others don't look, sound, or think like them. We need to celebrate differences, but also look at how we are united through similarities. The awesome part of agricultural education is that while we all have differences, we do have one thing that unites us: the blue FFA jacket. As we continually are

involved in helping shape the future of agriculture, let's be sure to celebrate both our similarities and differences and come together, so that every student feels welcomed and they have a place to belong. Agriculture is diverse not only across the world but also in our cities and schools, and creating a welcoming environment in our local communities is a perfect start to creating a seat for everyone at the table to be included and valued.

Agriculture is diverse not only across the world but also in our cities and schools, and creating a welcoming environment in our local communities is a perfect start to creating a seat for everyone at the table to be included and valued.



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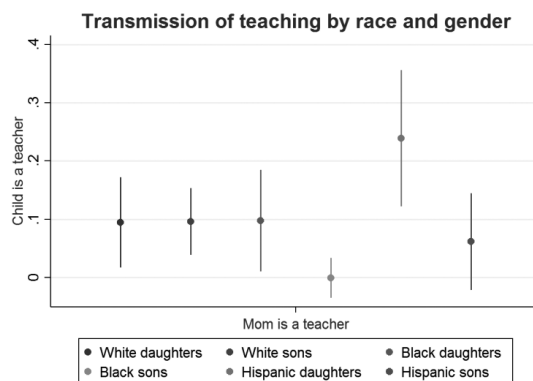
How the Teacher Diversity Gap is Literally Inherited: Implications for Agricultural Education and Beyond

by Nicholas P. Gallivan

Discovering insights into student outcomes is at the forefront of all teachers' minds. Whether it is increasing test scores, decreasing drop-out rates, or fostering learning skills, teachers' aims of making a difference in their students' lives is undeniable. But what if I told you that our efforts focusing on these strategies were all in vain; that a much more pervasive, yet overlooked factor was the biggest proponent—or opponent—of student success? That just might be the case when considering the teacher diversity gap. This topic is one that has gained more and more attention in recent years, yet it remains a growing issue in schools across America. The teacher diversity gap—the disparity between the demographic characteristics of teachers and the students they instruct—is an issue that goes much further than the surface differences in race and gender. It is a nuanced, complex matter that has been shown to predict a number of student and educational outcomes. To help clarify this phenomenon, I will discuss the data which help explain how this issue began, why it is an important issue to tackle both in agriculture education and beyond, and how we can approach this issue going forward.

To better understand the

Teacher diversity gap—the disparity between the demographic characteristics of teachers and the students they instruct



underlying processes of the teacher diversity gap, we must first look at our workforce of teachers across the American education system. Specifically, let's focus on who our teachers are and, surprisingly, who their parents are. The Brookings Institute has been collecting data on teachers for decades now, and they found an interesting trend regarding the heritability of the teaching profession (Gershenson & Jacinto, 2019). According to their data of high school graduates from the late 1970s to early 1980s, children of teachers are more than twice as likely to become teachers themselves compared to children of parents in other professions (Jacinto & Gershenson, 2019). The Brookings Institute researchers also found specific trends regarding race within these data. Although the data shows no trend of heritability between Black sons and their teacher parents (the only demographic group to not follow this trend), they did discover that heritability is strongest in daughters of Hispanic teach-

ers. Furthermore, they found that it is also especially strong in daughters of Black teachers and sons and daughters of White teachers (Jacinto & Gershenson, 2019). Although this data does not discern between teachers of different disciplines, we can assume these trends generalize across domains, such as with teachers of the agriculture sciences.

So, what are the implications of these data in terms of the teacher diversity gap? When examining the racial framework of the U.S. teaching workforce, the Brookings Institute shows a relatively stagnant, but enduring trend of about 80% White and mostly female teachers over the past few decades (Gershenson & Jacinto, 2019). When comparing this to a study reviewing the demographics of the FFA chapter advisors, we see similar trends regarding the demographics of FFA chapter advisors: although females constituted only 28% of the sample of FFA advisors (n = 35, 100% White), 93% of the male FFA advisors are White (Lawrence et al., 2013). When comparing these data of teachers and FFA advisors to that of our students, we see how the teacher diversity gap has materialized, including within agricultural education as well. The Brookings Institute reports that rates of students-of-color in our public education system has risen from 30% to now nearly 50% over the last few decades (Gershenson & Jacinto, 2019). Although

recent demographic statistics on FFA student members are slightly more homogenous—65% White, 11.5% Hispanic, 6.1% other race, 3.9 Black, and 13.5% undisclosed race—the organization recognizes and celebrates the growing diversity in its student membership (Ortiz, 2018). So, while the racial characteristics of our students have continued to shift, those of their teachers have not. This means that students—both within and outside of agricultural education programs—are learning from instructors who not only do not look like them, but also who may not share in fundamental social and cultural connections that are imperative to the teacher/student relationship.

With the disparity in racial equivalence between the U.S. teacher workforce and students enduring, how did this come to be? There is no direct conclusion to be made, but those at the Brookings Institute have an idea: teaching—like with farming and agriculture—may just be a “family business,” where children of teachers are more inclined to follow in their parent’s professional footsteps. Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (U.S., 1979) support this idea of transmission, as children with teacher mothers were 110% more likely to become teachers themselves when compared to families of similar professions like social work, counseling, and nursing. Furthermore, a similar trend of transmission was found with teacher fathers. Although their comparisons did not include professions within the agriculture industry, these trends of heritability are very familiar to farming. When reviewing the make-up of the U.S. farming industry, re-

cent statistics indicate that family farms account for nearly 99% of total U.S. farms (Hoppe & MacDonald, 2016). So, whether your parent is a high school math teacher or a grain farmer, these careers tend to attract those who are most familiar with them.

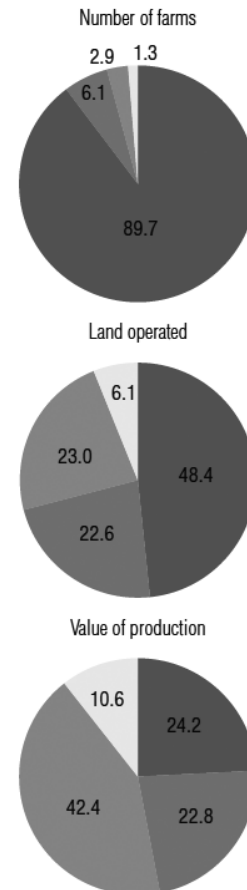
Using the data from the NLSY-1979 study, the researchers in the Brookings Institute study provide a few hypotheses as to why teaching is so hereditary. They resolve that having a teacher parent opens the door to certain privileges like access to resources, support, and job opportunities. Additionally, these parents may also act as an exemplar, either actively or passively, regarding the attractiveness and positive aspects of becoming a teacher. The researchers also posit that the transmission of certain personality and individual difference factors, such as altruism, extraversion, and comfort with children, from parent to child may also be at play (Gershenson & Jacinto, 2019). In sum, the authors believe that the social factors which children of teachers are regularly exposed to are strong contributors to these trends.

Knowing these data, it is also important to understand the student outcomes that are affected by these trends. Fortunately, the body of research is very clear on this matter: when students are taught by teachers who are the same race as them, student outcomes soar. Attendance in class, behavior at school, achievement in grades, even high school graduation and college enrollment have all been shown to improve when teachers look like the students they educate (Gershenson & Jacinto, 2019). When students have teachers who “look like them,”

Distribution of farms, value of production, and land operated by farm type, 2015

Percent of U.S. farms, acres operated, or value of production

● Small family farms ● Large-scale family farms
● Midsize family farms ○ Nonfamily farms



Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service and Economic Research Service, 2015 Agricultural Resource Management Survey.

they feel more connected to the instructor, more comfortable in the learning environment, and more motivated to perform well. Naturally, teachers and students within the agriculture sciences are not exempt from this reality.

The conclusions of these data and this article are in no way criticizing our current workforce of teachers, nor the hard work and care they show their students. With teaching shortages already hampering school districts, we

need teachers now more than ever to help effectively educate our children. According to a 2015 report, there was an estimated deficit of 287 agriculture educators in schools across the U.S. with such programs. As a result, 207 of these positions were filled by a non-licensed teacher while the remaining 80 positions went unfilled (Costello, 2017). Because of this deficit, it must be the imperative of all schools with agriculture programs to showcase the abundant opportunities that agriculture has to offer, both to students and to future teachers.

Although the authors of the Brookings Institute report acknowledge a lack of consensus in

When students are taught by teachers who are the same race as them, student outcomes soar.

recruiting into the teaching profession going forward, there are promising programs to consider that are already making a difference. One such program becoming more popular in higher education is Call Me MISTER (“Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models”). Established at Clemson University in 2000, this program was created to attract one of the most desired groups of students—men of color—into the teaching profession. Along with fostering a sense of community for the MISTERS, this program offers its student members both peer and professional mentorship, the potential for scholarship, as well as professional development opportunities throughout each

school year. The program’s main objective is to counteract the growing demographic discrepancy between teach-

ers and their students, and it incorporates exactly what is needed to combat the teacher diversity gap. It offers multiple forms of support for the MISTERS, and it directly challenges the notion that only certain types of people belong in certain professions. Clemson University, Kansas State University, and 20+ other schools across the country have successfully administered this program, actively taking steps to diversify the teaching workforce.

Although the Call Me MISTER program was originally established for the university setting, its efforts can easily be transformed to fit within secondary agricultural education programs, both for teachers and for students. Unfortunately, with both teaching and agriculture, students may be discouraged to explore the possibilities of these professions because of self-perceptions that they do not belong there. However, because this issue is parallel to those within the teacher diversity gap, it can be combated in the same way. By creating programs like Call Me MISTER and related student groups within agricultural education, we can actively begin breaking down those barriers. By encouraging high schoolers of diverse backgrounds to participate in programs that expose them to the advantages of the agriculture industry, their horizons to new opportunities are being broadened, along with the

With teaching shortages already hampering school districts, we need teachers now more than ever to help effectively educate our children.

horizons of the students that come after them. Moreover, positive experiences from this exposure could very well spark professional dreams of agricultural education in these students. Fostering this momentum could be the key to dismantling the diversity gap in both education and agriculture.

After discussing the teacher diversity gap and how it pertains to agricultural education, I have a few questions for you to consider going forward. How feasible do you think programs like Call Me MISTER or related student groups would be within your school’s agricultural education program? How could such programs be beneficial to students of diverse backgrounds in your school? And finally, what other efforts can your school make to recruit both teachers and students of diverse backgrounds into your agriculture programs? By answering—even just considering—these questions, you are taking the initial steps to combat the teacher diversity gap.

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Nick is currently a graduate student at Kansas State University working toward his PhD in Social & Personality Psychology and serving as the College of Education's Graduate Diversity Coordinator. As a native of rural Illinois and an alumnus of the University of Iowa, he has witnessed the value of agriculture and its education firsthand. Professionally, Nick hopes to work in and conduct research on environmental advocacy and sustainability.

THEME ARTICLE

Our Burden of Inclusivity

by Fabian Leon

My Message to Agricultural Educators:

You, a stakeholder in agricultural education, more than anyone should place a high priority on being knowledgeable and proactive in embedding into your teaching an understanding of the **culture** that surrounds your agriculture. I'm talking about food preferences and access, the history of slavery, land rights, labor issues, racial stereotypes, etc. These are crucial and global conversations.

If you fail to acknowledge the historical context, stereotypes, and institutional injustices that undoubtedly permeate through your

local agriculture scene then you share the responsibility for letting the agriculture industry slip in the wrong direction, towards ignorance and indifference. Perhaps you will be fine with this status quo, even if agriculture goes in the wrong direction for a long while, but the rest of us (young people and underrepresented minorities especially) cannot afford to squander any potential progress or positive impacts that agriculture can have on our communities.

It was from a past Mississippi FFA state officer that I first heard the phrase "There's no growth in the comfort zone and no comfort

in the growth zone." But reflecting on my years of experience in the FFA, I have noticed patterns of righteous talk like that about how we should challenge ourselves to expand our perspectives and how agriculture is a diverse and inclusive field without any intentional action to challenge the status quo and make space specifically for those left out. You owe it to our students to learn where they are coming from and challenge them on their world view. Especially if their world view has been shaped only by their experiences in their county! If you're a formal educator, you should have an even larger

sense of responsibility to be a role model for your students. What you may not realize is that if your student is part of an underrepresented or marginalized identity in agriculture, then you have your work cut out for you. But this only makes it that much more important that you succeed in showcasing the impact of agriculture and engaging them.

I say all of this because my experiences growing up around agricultural education have forced me to think about inclusion of the minority viewpoint in our industry more than the typical student. Embedding myself into the world of FFA was way too hard of a process for my middle and high school self. The ideals and way of thinking of most of the students in my chapter were real deterrents to me wanting to be involved. It was not a place where I could be my whole self and not have to worry about being accepted. It was not somewhere my parents could volunteer and get involved because their broken English would see them dismissed. Gradually, I had to



change the way I spoke, the music I listened to, and try to fit in with others who had a much closer proximity to production agriculture. All so that I could comfortably learn about agriscience. For me this discomfort translated into personal growth because there's no growth in the comfort zone and no comfort in the growth zone. But truly, I had no business being an FFA kid given what Kentucky FFA looked like and felt like. To this day, I am upset about how I approached those years in FFA and how Kentucky FFA hasn't changed much. My childhood best friend became a state officer and remains intimately involved with KYFFA happenings. I never pursued higher offices or ran for state office because I knew what a state officer was supposed to look and sound like and that was not me. I mean, when was the last time that Kentucky FFA had a state officer that wasn't white?

My years in middle and high school saw a lot of shortcomings in our agricultural education. They also made me that much more determined to succeed and change my approach to leadership once I made it to college. Once in college I saw many alternative models and role models in agricultural leadership. The broadening of my horizons allowed me to clearly see how I am not the first or last minority to experience discomfort while striving towards the agricultural industry. My time at the University of Kentucky allowed me to take full ownership of my agricultural education and I feel that I have done exactly what I wanted with it. It also showed me



the vast network of agricultural educators working intentionally to make positive changes for minorities with similar experiences.

I urge you to find this network, surround yourself with people of opposing perspectives, and be intentional with the extension of opportunities to students who may have many more voices telling them that agriculture isn't for them. But most importantly, I urge you to never stop practicing and learning about diversity and inclusion efforts because none of us are perfect with respect and inclusivity and none of us ever will be.



Fabian is a master's student at Texas A&M University studying sorghum breeding and genetics. He received his B.S. in Agricultural Biotechnology from the University of Kentucky where he was actively involved in MANRRS and served as a local chapter officer as well as a national officer. He was also involved in Agriculture Future of America where he served as a 2018-2019 Student Advisory Team member. Fabian first became involved in agricultural education and the FFA from 6th-12th grade in his hometown of Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Voices of Our Students

curated by Carla Jagger, with help from Nina Crutchfield, Fabian Leon, Ken Kozuma, Kim Mesa, Lana Myers, Libby Sanderson and Dane White

When I heard the title of this magazine issue my first thought was that I would love to have students contribute their insights. I sent some questions out to a few teachers across the country in hopes they would have students who felt they had something to say. I hope that you will find their thoughts to be as insightful as I have. It is important to start facilitating authentic and sometimes difficult conversations with all individuals we interact with, but especially our own students.

What conversations do you wish people would have with you?

“As an advocate for agriculture, I have dedicated my journey to extending an open hand to members of the FFA in order for them to reach their limitless potential. The most intricate part of making this a possibility is realizing that every student has a different background and story behind them. Agriculture educators spend countless hours learning and understanding these individuals within their chapters, and I strongly believe that if us students worked just as hard as our advisor in the understanding of our peers and classmates that we see on a day to day basis, then we can all open our minds to agriculture education and truly live to serve as progressive agriculturists.”
— *Michael Bray, Atwater FFA*

“I wish people would have meaningful conversations with me, conversations about our point of view on certain things, conversations on our

goals in life, and conversations of our future and what it means to us.” (Jose Santos, Galt FFA)

“A conversation I wish people would talk with me would be probably about my past and how I overcame a couple of obstacles.”
— *Johnny Jimenez, Galt FFA*

“I wish educators, in general, would talk more about agriculture. Although it is a foundation of our lives, I don’t think there is enough coverage in any other school subjects. For example, we don’t learn about important staple crops in our history or in literature, but more of how it affected the economy and led to technological growth. However, I wish agricultural figures and agricultural educators would break the stigma around joining this career pathway. I don’t hear a lot of people becoming excited about agriculture as we used to, unless they were born into the business and it’s hard here, especially in Hawaii, to join this workforce. I want them to talk more about how to break this kind of barrier and how agriculture ties into and merges with other career choices.” — *Vheena Sistoza, Grade 10, Waipahu High School, Hawaii, Current FFA Chapter President*

“For me personally, I feel one conversation that I would like to have is involving agriculture. As some individuals do not know much about the production of a commodity that may even be in the same place where they live, I’d like the opportunity to discuss this.”
— *Caitlin Coleman, Elton, FFA*

“I wish people would volunteer to share why they got involved with agriculture and why I got involved with agriculture. I wish we could have the conversation about how to positively engage more identities in agriculture that typically have a negative association of what the agriculture industry means for people like them. I wish people would ask how I perceived what agriculture was when I was 10 years old and why I felt a sense of responsibility and had a chip on my shoulder early on to make an impact on the agriculture industry because of my ethnic background, personal upbringing, and family.” — *Fabian Leon*

“I wish people would have meaningful and deep conversations with me more often. Deep and meaningful conversations are the origin of every friendship/ relationship. They are where people get to understand each other’s perspective through past experiences. Of course, these conversations don’t just happen out of nowhere, people first have to take the initiative to be vulnerable by sharing a piece of their life. This initiative is one of the most important steps to take to tackle this world of prejudice. See, there is one thing people have in common no matter their race, gender, and past experiences, that we are all human. We all have our own unique story, and we should willingly let this story shine in the light.”
— *Francisco Alvarez, Galt FFA*

“One conversation that I wish people would have with me is about GMOs (Genetically Modi-

fied Organisms) and organic food, and the controversy surrounding them. I was in Extemporaneous Speaking last year, and these were the two topics that I really fell in love with. There is so much debate sparked about these two topics, and doing research on them helped to get a better view on these topics. I love to talk to people about these two topics, and better educate them on the pros and cons...maybe I just like to argue, but I feel that by teaching others who maybe aren't as involved with the ag community about what GMOs actually are and how organic foods compare to conventional foods, makes me feel like I am helping them to not be so afraid of different foods in the food industry and better educate them about these topics." — *Elisabeth Garner, Atwater FFA*

“The most common response from my students were related to real life talks about the future. Most of my students want to talk to adults about what the world is really like after high school. They want the truth, good and bad. Most of my students are scared of the next few years because they feel pressured about having to know what they want to do for the rest of their life before they leave high school.” — *Libby Sanderson's summary of student responses*

When have you felt excluded from a conversation? What could have been done in that situation to help you feel included?

“I have felt excluded from a conversation when I was raising my hand in class to share out an idea and was never called on. Something I could've done to keep myself included in the conversation

was to make sure the person who was calling on people knew I was raising my hand. Another thing I could've done was call for their attention politely and later thank them for calling on you. Finally, something I one hundred percent need to do next time I am excluded from a conversation is to not immediately give up on their conversation and try to include myself in the conversation by introducing a new topic that is inclusive to all.” — *Francisco Alvarez, Galt FFA*

“In any situation I feel excluded from a conversation, I tend to squeeze my way back in by making eye contact and planting my feet facing the person who is speaking. I tend to start agreeing with what the other person is saying. I usually feel excluded from conversations when I'm around my friends, and it's always when they're talking about a time they may have hung out and I didn't understand what they were saying simply because I wasn't there. So, I try to connect what I can with what they're saying and put some of my input in if I can. Almost every time it's taking a simple conversation starter or something you know about and relate it to whatever they are talking about, and that's how I get myself back into a conversation I feel excluded from.” — *Hayley Vargas, Atwater FFA*

“I honestly cannot remember a time where I have felt excluded, but have seen where others felt out of place within a conversation. One thing that I could have done was to more interactive with that individual. It could be as simple as asking how their day was going.” — *Caitlin Coleman, Elton, FFA*

“The worst thing about my place in the agriculture leadership space is that I am often tokenized,

intentionally or unintentionally as a result of institutional structures that make me the only latinx in the room. What should be done in these instances to make me feel included is to tell me that you acknowledge that I'm the only one and that you're working to change those institutional structures, proactively and intentionally, to allow for greater participation from latinxs in the future. And not like a strategic vision for 2050, I mean like a procedure that we can start doing next week. Otherwise you're just talking righteously without backing it up.” — *Fabian Leon*

What conversations do you wish people would avoid having with you?

“I prefer to avoid conversations that are one-sided, and where the other person I'm speaking to cannot agree to disagree. These types of conversations start when issues like politics, human rights, religion, etc. are brought up. It's not that I don't want to talk about these issues, it's just when a person's language veers from objective to subjective is when I steer clear.” — *Kaleb Lemoine, Elton, FFA*

“I wish people would stop avoiding the conversation about having an agricultural career. Many people aspire to be other things and I think educators should promote that being in this career pathway is okay and reasonable. I also believe that people in Hawaii are not purposely avoiding these conversations about agricultural but see no use in having them, being agriculture is not a main source of economy. We should start informing the newer generations of what agriculture really is and why it is important to continue its impact in communities

and statewide.” (Vheena Sistoza)

“I wish people understood that I don’t have all the answers and I will not be a spokesperson for ALL latinxs. If I had a perfect solution to the inequity that latinxs and underrepresented minorities experience in the agriculture industry, then I would’ve implemented it already.” — *Fabian Leon*

What do you want people to stop assuming about you?

“I am very sociable and talkative when I am around people. I am the most sociable when I am around people I do know and who know me. While having conversations with my classmates, some of them would assume that accomplishing their goals are hard to meet and that they would rather give up than to keep going. I am a firm believer that anything that you truly wish for can be and will be accomplished if you work hard for it. I believe that if you truly want that dream to come true, you would work hard to achieve it. Although, there will be challenges that will bring you down, to the point of making you believe that you should not continue your dream, there are potential benefits for going through those challenges because not only will you accomplish your dream, but you will also grow as a person and learn how to overcome them. I agree, assuming that reaching your goals are impossible to attain and to give up is a lot easier than to work hard for that accomplishment but I know that reaching your goal leaves you a better feeling about yourself than the feeling of not trying at all. People should stop assuming what is impossible and instead, start trying to make goals possible.” — *Luz Soto, Atwater FFA*

“That because I live in a small town, I have to be narrow-minded and judgmental.” — *Kaleb Lemoine, Elton FFA*

“I want people to stop assuming that I have little to no flaws and that I am hard to approach. Although my life seems to always go smoothly, I constantly struggle to organize myself and struggle mentally when something goes wrong. I also seem to always be infuriated with the previous actions I have done or hesitated to do. I am human, I make mistakes, I struggle a lot because I am just like everyone else. I believe this is one of the main reasons that people think I am hard to approach, they think that they wouldn’t “qualify” to be one of my friends but in reality, I am very similar to many people.” — *Francisco Alvarez, Galt FFA*

“This question gave me the most varied answers: ‘I wish people would quit assuming I’m dumb because I’m in special ed.’; ‘I wish people would not assume I’m going to go to college to be a veterinarian just because my sister is.’; ‘I wish people would stop thinking I’m anorexic because I’m so skinny. I try to gain weight all the time.’; ‘I wish people would stop assuming that I’m shy because I would really like to have friends but I don’t know how to talk to people.’; ‘I wish people would stop assuming I’m a bad person because I don’t believe in the same god they do.’; ‘I don’t think people assume anything about me because I don’t think people even know I exist.’” — *Libby Sanderson’s summary of student responses*

“I want people to stop assuming that agriculture is just farming and sweating on hot fields every day. Many people assume agriculture is for people with all

muscle and no brains. There are different systems that our food has to go through, which includes marketing, distribution, processing, preparation & consumption, waste recovery & nutrient recycling, and others. These systems all require unique sets of skills, along with agricultural knowledge and it goes to show that you don’t have to be just a farmer. You can be a botanist or start an agribusiness. Agriculture opens the way for many opportunities in the future.” — *Vheena Sistoza*

“I want people to just not assume anything about me and just get to know me.” — *Kristian Aceves, Galt FFA*



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Crossing Borders and Removing Barriers: Agricultural Education for All

by Libby Sanderson

In July of 2018, I received word that the agriculture teacher in my town was leaving his position to focus on running his new nursery and landscaping business. Although I was happy teaching at the socio-economically depressed school just six miles down the road, there were too many good opportunities available for myself and my son at Clarksville High School not to apply. The interview and hiring process was over before I knew it and I became a Clarksville Panther.

One of the reasons I wanted to move is because I knew Clarksville was more culturally diverse than the school I had left. I knew there was a large Hispanic population and I looked forward to practicing my Spanish. I had taken a couple of years of Spanish in high school and worked with many Spanish speaking people in my previous profession, law enforcement. Surely I would be able to find one student willing to compete as a Spanish FFA Creed speaker. I remember meeting with Clarksville's guidance counselor, Mrs. Wiggins, before the first week of school. I told her about my excitement and how I had been brushing up on my Spanish. She looked at me a bit amused then informed me we had plenty of Spanish speaking students but, we also had ten other languages spoken at our school. I didn't realize there were twelve different languages in the entire world, dialects maybe but not totally different languages. My curiosity got the better of me and I decided to investigate. After a few emails I learned that only sixty percent of the students

in my school district speak English at home. Thirty percent speak Spanish at home. The other ten percent of languages include: Burmese, Gujarati, Hmong, Korean, Choson-O, Laotian; Pha Xa Lao, Marshallese, Pilipino, Sgaw Karen, Thai, and Vietnamese. I was given my list of students whose names I had never heard before and was sure to mispronounce. I was also informed that my classes were completely full and there was a waiting list to get in.

We all know that teaching agriculture is a great profession full of many different subjects. Agriculture teachers have to know how to keep a greenhouse running, how to inseminate cattle, how to rebuild a lawnmower, how to encourage youth to become leaders, how to save the environment and how to well, everything; we have to know everything. How in the world do you teach students from twenty-six different countries, speaking twelve different languages everything? The answer is; you just do.

I remember the first few weeks of school. I focused on trying to stay on track, and trying to learn names. Boy, that's a tough one especially since in some of the Asian cultures, it is customary for no one to keep the same surname. My students might have four or five names and many have the same first and last name with several different middle names. I had a boy and girl who sat next to each other in one of my classes. They had different last names and were close in age. By the way they fought back and forth, I assumed they were boyfriend and

girlfriend. I was surprised when I found out they were actually brother and sister. One of the ways I earned the respect of my English language learning students was by asking them about their names. In one of the Asian cultures, the Karen custom is for the child's name to mean something. I always ask my Karen, Burmese, and Thai students what their names mean. Usually it means power or gold or flower or river. One of my students had a name I hadn't heard before. When asked about the meaning of her name, she was reluctant to tell, but after a little prodding from her friends, she admitted it meant, sleepy hungry. I knew right then I wanted to be her mentor. I had all the skills to help her live up to her name potential.

There were many challenges my first year. My students and I met each one head on. These were challenges I bet most FFA Advisors haven't come across in most of their dealings. One of our biggest hurdles was, and still is food. My kids from other countries don't like to eat the same things my native students eat. I had to take into consideration that many of my Asian students don't like anything other than Asian cuisine. Many of my Hispanic students will not eat anything Asian. Most of my American students would not eat anything other than American cuisine and aren't usually quick to try new things. Asian students don't eat or even understand the American fascination with cheese. My American students don't appreciate the spices in Hispanic or Asian cooking. My Hispanic kids aren't used to pizza and hamburgers.



Needless to say, it's not always easy pleasing everyone. I always allow my students to bring food on trips. Many of my Asian students prefer rice and have little pots they can cook it in without problems. It doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother them and so far, I haven't had anyone die from starvation on a trip. Last year during Arkansas FFA Convention, we ate Pho one night and tamales the next. At least thirty percent of us were happy all of the time. The second hurdle is getting all members in Official Dress. It sounds so simple, black skirt, panty hose, dress shoes, etc. Have you ever tried to explain pantyhose to students who have never heard of such torture? How about trying to find dress shoes to fit students who have never worn shoes? My students from island nations have always worn slippers or flip flops (even during winter). Their feet aren't designed like ours. They weren't trained to be narrow and fit into a shoe. Many of my students from tropical areas have feet too wide for most

dress shoes. It's been a hurdle, but we've survived! I've scoured every Salvation Army and Goodwill from one side of the state to the other and been able to amass a large collection of wide shoes. We gave up on pantyhose and just decided pants would work for our female members. Sometimes you have to pick your battles and I am grateful for the ability for ladies to now wear pants if they choose.

I have always thought a good teacher is also a good student. Even though I'm now in the role of teacher, I've never given up being a student. I love to learn. I've recently taken it upon myself to learn a little about each of the languages my students speak. Physically I find it hard to speak some of the Asian languages. My mouth has to contort into unusual positions to make some of the phonetic sounds. It's hard to imag-

ine these children are moved from countries where the alphabet can be circles, squiggly lines, and dots to a country where nearly everyone speaks and writes in English. Not only are they having to leave the only place they've ever know, they have to adjust to a new place, new language, new customs, new laws, new climate, new food, basically new everything. Now, I greet each student in their native language when they enter the class. I've learned several phrases in each language and the students appreciate my effort. They are always quick to correct my mistakes and love teaching me new things. It's also important to understand some of these students are coming to the United States to escape a dangerous situation in their home country. Having spent most of the first half of my working career in law enforcement, I've seen situations I wouldn't want my child to see. Many of my students have been in situations no one would ever want their child to see or even hear about. Even though they've survived these atrocities and tragedies, these students are happy. I am greeted every single day with, "Good morning teacher! What are you going to teach us today?"

At the end of my first year I was bombarded with requests for letters of recommendation to universities, colleges, trade schools, and job references. I was honored to write them all. Several of my students received academic schol-

Not only are they having to leave the only place they've ever know, they have to adjust to a new place, new language, new customs, new laws, new climate, new food, basically new everything.

arships and are now attending post-secondary institutions. I still receive emails, calls, and school visits when a student needs help. Lucky for them, we have so many wonderful teachers at our school who selflessly give their time to help all of our students, former and present. One of the proudest moments of my life happened just two weeks ago when my sweet “Sleepy Hungry” student invited me to attend one of the most important days of her life. Aw Mee (Sleepy Hungry) had asked me

When it comes to teaching, kids are kids are kids. Their nationalities, religions, customs, and cultures may be different, but they all deserve to learn.

last year to help her study during lunch. Of course I did and we went over her flash cards day after day. I assumed she was studying for a civics test and started to question why she even needed my help because she knew the answers better than I did. I asked her why she was so worried about one test. She

said, “Miss, I’m studying to become an American citizen. It is the most important thing to me.” I told her if she were to pass the exam, I would come to her naturalization ceremony. I received her invitation last month and was honored to attend. I cried as she took her oath as I would have for my own child. My sweet Sleepy Hungry student is now a proud American citizen and I’m proud to call her my fellow American. When it comes to teaching, kids are kids are kids. Their nationalities, religions, customs, and cultures may be different, but they all deserve to learn. Embrace the differences, learn from them and I promise, they will learn from you. It takes very little effort to show you care. I believe in all of my students because they are the future of agriculture.



Libby Sanderson is an Agriculture teacher at Clarksville High School in Clarksville Arkansas. She graduated from Arkansas Tech University with a B.S. in Agriculture Business/Animal Science and has a Master of Arts in Teaching from Southern Arkansas University.

Open the Door: Making Difficult Conversations Doable

by Dane White

“See me when you can, please. We need to talk.” In the early years of my teaching career this seemed to be my go-to statement when a difficult conversation needed to occur. From what I’ve been told, few things struck fear in a late-2000s Galt High teenager’s heart than those words. At the time I was just trying to take care of business and check something off my list. In retrospect, I get why those words signaled choppy waters ahead. Often acerbic and devoid of solutions, the difficult conversation that typically followed that message would rarely facilitate a constructive resolution to the issue at hand. Instead I’d often engage in an unnecessarily withering rebuke of someone’s behavior and send them on their way, figuring they’d learn their lesson and onward we would go. In retrospect, that approach was practically useless and just resulted in hard feelings. The issue at hand wasn’t one of intent; I always had growth and improvement at heart. Instead, it was an issue of skill (or lack thereof, to be frank).

Sadly, in the busy seasons (read: every season) of an ag teacher’s work it seems like those situations can happen more often than we’d like. There are more tasks for an ag teacher to do than there is time in which to do them. Thus, a difficult conversation can be a stick in our spokes- waylaying the day’s momentum and sidelining any hope for crossing the to-do list finish line. Additionally, mustering the will to address the issue mindfully can feel like an even more Herculean task.

Sadly, that also means we can put ourselves in line for further difficulties- the snowball effect, if you will. One poorly constructed conversation sets a precedent and often facilitates more difficult conversations. Sometimes they end up being with upset parents, frustrated administrators or angry community members. No matter the case, the fewer of those the better.

After many unfortunate missteps on my part, I was reminded of a tool I learned many years ago. It’s called “Open the Front Door” (OTFD) and it’s an acronym that stands for four basic steps that can help guide the practitioner through a difficult conversation. Once I remembered it and applied it as an Ag teacher, I was amazed at how the benefits of OTFD manifested. Students were less anxious when we “needed to talk”, colleagues were more open-minded during our professional disagreements and I had to endure fewer punitive conversations with my administrators about my cavalier approach to tough talks. Students also came to adopt the model and I began to explicitly teach it in my courses, knowing it could be a useful skill for any young leader to have in their arsenal.

It’s not foolproof and requires some degree of mindful preparation, but it’s among the wisest investments we can make when it comes to changing interpersonal dynamics. Also, it’s a straightforward, easily replicable process that follows existing research about brain engagement in solution creation (Jones & Hughes, 2003). A quick Google search on the topic

results in several iterations of the strategy; here is one that is assertive and cooperative in equal measure as well as easy to apply.

O-Open-Observe

The first step in the process is to state observations; much as a doctor might. This is a detached, unemotional, clinical step based on concrete facts. The framing device associated with this step could be: “I’ve noticed”, “I’ve observed”, “lately I’ve been seeing specific things such as...”, etc. Both parties should be able to agree with the observations. In practice it might sound like this: “Jose I noticed your officer parts weren’t in by Friday when we agreed they would be due” or “Mia I’ve observed you’ve been tardy to class three times this past week”. It can also be made behavioral, but with care and detachment; “Nathan your response to me when I asked you to put your phone away is not typical for you.” This step in the process may be the most critical, as it reduces the emotional temperature of the conversation right away. The amygdala (responsible for our fight-flight-or-freeze response) isn’t hijacked by the intense “feeling” words that often accompany difficult conversations and instead the neocortex can process information rationally. After the statement of facts, it can be wise to follow up with an agreement question such as “Can you see that as well?” or “Do my observations register with you?” in order to make sure both parties are on the same page before moving forward. This step requires mindfulness to ensure our own

feelings don't creep in and disrupt the process; advanced preparation such as jotting observations down on a post-it note can help.

T-The-Think

The second step in the process is to express your thoughts on the observations. This still is unemotional and is removed from feeling-type words while still speaking in "I" statements. Appropriate frames for this step could be: "based on those things, I think..." or "it makes me wonder" or "I'm curious about...". Applied to the examples stated above: "Jose I'm wondering if there was a miscommunication on our part about the expectations?" or "Nathan I'm curious if there's something going on that would be helpful for us to talk about?". You can also say something along the lines of, "When I'm done speaking, I'd like to hear your thoughts on that" and invite them to share. Such statements allow for a natural, slow progression from clinical observation to emotion.

F-Front-Feel

The third step in the process is the statement of your feelings. If the earlier two steps go as planned, this is a point where you can share yours. Again, using "I" statements is best and it's recommended to keep away from aggressive verbiage. Terms such as "confused", "frustrated", "upset", "hurt" and "uncomfortable" will typically get us much closer to a productive solution than "mad", "angry" or "furious" will. In practice this might sound like: "Nathan I'm saddened that you would speak to me that way" or "Jose I'm frustrated that you didn't uphold your end of the bargain." If the feeling words chosen are authentic to the experience

and appropriately assertive this step can be a master stroke for the successful resolution of the conversation. This is also a point where non-verbal communication skills require attention; often the invocation of emotions can rile us up and we forget to pay attention to our behaviors.

D-Door-Do

The final step in the process is the "what's next" piece: do. Many difficult conversations are handled inexpertly in that they don't point the compass toward a resolution. OTFD ensures that there are suggestions about what to do after the conversation ends. The "do" piece is about future practices and behaviors rather than merely atoning for prior infractions. It ought to be framed in the positive. "Jose from here on out I need to see you turning in your script parts on time." "Nathan in the future when you have a problem you'd like to discuss with me, let's handle it directly and outside of class." The "do" step is the handing off of a compass that gives the other party some intended direction. Rather than asking them to aimlessly flounder and figure out some sort of solution on the spot, you can provide a roadmap of sorts on where to go from here.

Though it may feel cumbersome, the OTFD process actually comes together rather quickly. If written, it may be as lean as four sentences. The process can certainly be as long as the conversation demands, but it's really the architecture that counts. Here's how the Jose example comes together:

"Jose I noticed your officer parts weren't in by Friday when we agreed they would be due. I'm wondering if there was a

miscommunication on our part about the expectations? I'm frustrated that you didn't uphold your end of the bargain and from here on out need to see you turn in your parts on time. Clear? Thoughts from you on this?"

I laughed when writing this article and even joked with a former student about the clumsiness of my early approaches to difficult conversations. I was often reminded by my department chair that a little more tact wouldn't hurt, which thankfully led me back to OTFD. Now, I can't imagine navigating challenging interpersonal situations without this tool.

That's not to say it's always easy; but like most anything practice improves one's skill and increased returns on the time invested follow. Difficult conversations can either raze a relationship to the ground or they can be used to cultivate growth and improvement. It all depends on our chosen approach.

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The Agricultural Education Magazine

Teaching is Training

by Matt Detjen

The first day of school is exciting, nervous, and a stressful time for both students and educators alike. It's the day where we lay down the rules for our classroom or work on creating it with the class, building expectations from both sides. It's where, when we are first starting out, we hear "don't smile until the third week" or "send at least one student to the office on the first day." But of all those choices what is the correct one? All choices result in consequences, some carefully planned for, some are unseen, and others are unknown until we make that choice. From how we set up and create our classroom atmosphere and how we handle the consequences will affect our student's behavior.

Training our students takes time, patience, and hard exhausting work; but when it finally clicks the results are smooth sailing. Now how do we change our student's behavior? There's been many methods from the past, currently in use, and many more to come. I will discuss using operant conditioning in this article. This is conditioning a behavior by the use of reinforcement that is given after the desired response. Now what's the desired response? That's the question you have to ask yourself and might have to continue to ask yourself as the year goes on. It can change based on situation or what your school's policy might be. When we give out a worksheet our desired behavior is that students complete said worksheet, so what do you do if a student doesn't? This is our choice of how to handle the situation and create

our classroom atmosphere. This is where behavior modification comes from and our technique of operant conditioning can assist us.



Students learn to raise their hand the same way a walrus can learn to raise its flipper. Reinforcing the correct behavior and action is key to modifying behavior.

There is reinforcement; something that will increase the probability of a behavior being repeated. And there's punishments; something that will decrease the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Both reinforcement and punishment can be positive; something added to the situation, or negative; something removed from the situation. Positive reinforcement will strengthen a behavior by providing a consequence that the individual finds rewarding, you are

adding a reinforcement to increase the behavior. An example of this would be if we paid our students \$5 every time, they completed their homework, that way they are more likely to repeat this behavior in the future, but also bankrupt the teacher. Positive punishment is adding something to reduce a behavior such as yelling at a dog as it jumps up on a counter. It can work in some situations, but overall, it might work in the short term but in the long term it might cause more behavioral issues.

Timing and delivery are a key component in making the reinforcement

more meaningful. Consider the age group you are working with, sticker for seniors might not be too reinforcing but for elementary students it will be worth gold. Other factors to account for are the student functioning level, if the student has any IEP's or just the age of the student. An elementary student will function at a lower level than a high school student. Also, the timing of the reinforcement, when do you give the praise or item, or whatever your choice of reinforce-

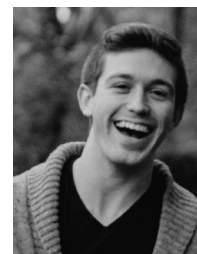
ment is. Timing is key to have an effective reinforcement. You don't want to wait until the end of the school year to point out the good things a student did months ago.

Now this may sound like a lot of information and you're worried about timing and choosing the right method but with practice it can require little to no effort from the educator. Within our classrooms we can use social reinforcers like verbal praise, smiles, compliments and high fives. There is also the reinforcement of activities. Students like doing things more than listening to a PowerPoint so classroom games, technology time, or a chunk of free time at the end of class can be very effective. There

are also the tangible reinforcers, the physical goodies that you can give out like stickers or candy but be careful of falling too quickly to using the same method every time. Variety is the spice of life to keep from creating a routine.

So how do we move forward with this new knowledge in our classroom? A simple idea is to set our students up for success by making the right choice easy and the wrong choice hard. Same way you close the door to keep the dog from running outside you have to set up your environment to best lead your students to make the choice you want to reward. Many trainers say you can train anything so why can't we train

our students? With proper training and reinforcement, we can reduce student conflict and manage our classroom with ease. Remember, it takes time, patience, and a plan for what you want to accomplish. With that, best of luck, have fun, and happy training!



Matt Detjen, Interpretive Naturalist at Minnesota Zoo, Ag Ed Master student at University of Minnesota, Coach at Northfield Public Schools.

THEME ARTICLE

From Idea to Action: NAAE and National FFA Address Inclusion, Diversity and Equity

by Ellen Thompson

The three-component model that is agricultural education works because it creates a meaningful connection between learning and real-life application. To continue to be relevant, agricultural education needs a teaching force and student enrollment that reflect society's demographics as a whole. Diversity in thought, race, gender, sexual orientation, background, beliefs, religions, socioeconomic status, and more are required to challenge the status quo and keep agricultural education innovative and inclusive.

In May 2018, leadership from the National Association of Agri-

cultural Educators (NAAE) and the National FFA Organization met to discuss a collaborative effort to address the lack of FFA member and agricultural educator diversity according to the annual National FFA member data and the AAE National Supply and Demand Study. Both organizations knew things needed to improve but had no clear path to success. Diversity consultant Charlotte Westerhaus-Renfrow joined the group and guided the conversation. Charlotte had presented at the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) Diversity Summit and is known for her di-

versity work with the NCAA.

Charlotte asked probing questions about what the "mountain-top goals" were? Why NAAE and National FFA wanted to focus on diversity and inclusion? What barriers existed? Why the lack of diversity in FFA membership and among agricultural educators? The team spent several sessions wrestling with the questions and concluded much more work and collaboration with internal and external partners would be needed. Through Charlotte's help, the team identified the mountain-top goal as ensuring that agricultural education programs reflect the communities they serve.

Throughout the sessions with Charlotte, the need to create organizations, programs, policies, and practices that are accessible to all, to respect everyone, and to be welcoming would be essential to achieving the mountaintop goal. Over the next year, with Charlotte's help, NAAE and National FFA reached out to the agricultural education community for their input. Focus group sessions were held at the National FFA Convention & Expo where students, educators, teacher educators, state staff, and stakeholders engaged in guided conversation, facilitated by Charlotte with a stenographer taking notes. An open invitation electronic survey was conducted asking for feedback similar to the questions posed during the focus groups. A sampling of the questions:

What are some agriculture classroom or programs (i.e., National FFA, NAAE, etc.) that you find to be particularly comfortable/safe spaces for you to fit in? – student question

Are you aware of students or teachers who were treated differently in agriculture classrooms or programs, (i.e., National FFA, NAAE, etc.) that you believe was based on their identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and if so, how? – educator question

How can National FFA and NAAE efforts help with regards to fostering diversity and inclusion in the schools and communities in which you reside? What else can they do? – question to all

The focus group and survey responses were compiled, analyzed, and reviewed. The volunteer participants were hon-

est and constructive in their responses. A snapshot of the responses from the more than 1,000 pages of notes compiled from the focus groups and surveys:

Personally, my experiences have been fine, but agricultural education as a whole lacks much diversity ... While FFA claims to have something for everyone, that doesn't mean that everyone feels welcome and included. Major ongoing efforts must be made to attract more diverse prospective teachers. Simultaneously, the ag education culture must shift to support and retain them.

My students do not feel welcome at most FFA district, state, and national events because of their race. I feel as if there is not enough multicultural education taught to ag teachers or multicultural programming at any level.

I have no direct experience with either (exclusion or diversity), yet I feel these programs are unnecessary. We should be including all students in our programs, and programs shouldn't be needed to accomplish this.

In many cases, the activities (NAAE and National FFA) were inclusive to those in attendance; however, there was not much diversity among those in attendance. I'm sure most there felt valued; many not in attendance may not have felt valued.

I have encountered acceptance and inclusion of all involved.

Since teaching at a more diverse school the past four years, I've become more aware of how homogenous ag education is on a national level. When diverse people are profiled in the national FFA magazine or NAAE publications, it seems like a to-

ken interview to prove we're not as white as we really are.

Award recipients are nearly always white, Christian and rural.

Teachers gravitate toward students who have the means to participate — possibly isolating students who struggle economically.

Some teachers see NAAE leadership as those who wear jeans and a belt buckle are the only ones who will be national leaders.

Teachers with diverse programs are not active and involved beyond the local level. Not held up and celebrated unless being used for their diversity.

The students, educators, teacher educators, state staff, and stakeholders also provided countless recommendations to address the inclusion, diversity and equity disparities at NAAE and National FFA:



Dr. Roger Cleveland discusses the difference between equity and equality in the classroom setting with Future Agriscience Teacher (FAST) Symposium participants.

Improve teacher education preparation training in diversity.

New teachers need training specific to the needs of their communities.

Training for teachers on how to create inclusive and tolerant classrooms.

Providing a wide range of student and teacher mentors to showcase the diversity in agricultural education. Remove the “nobody looks like me” stigma.

Offer a system for teachers to determine if their program reflects their community in terms of diversity and include ways to achieve diversity if not there.

Create ag history curriculum that focuses on the contributions of minorities, women and other underrepresented populations.

The feedback and recommendations further showcased the concerns that prompted NAAE and National FFA to make inclusion, diversity, and equity efforts a priority. Using the participant feedback, and again with Charlotte’s guidance, NAAE and National FFA identified student and educator cultural competency and inclusivity training as the first step. It’s not fair to ask people to change the way they do things without first providing why improvements need to be made and giving people the tools to make the improvements.

In mid-2018, a 40-person task force was convened through an open all call and met in December 2018. The task force was charged with taking the inclusivity and cultural competency focus areas and nailing down the specifics: What should be the training topics? How should the training sessions be delivered? Where should

the training sessions be delivered? Who should deliver the training sessions? How will the training sessions be assessed? The task force recommendation summary:

Training Content Areas

Educators:

- Identifying and combatting unconscious bias and micro-messaging.
- Inclusive classroom/chapter strategies while addressing barriers.
- Using inclusive language and building inclusive environments – Cultural Competency 101.

Students:

- Defining and recognizing unconscious/implicit bias.
- Cultural competency.
- Inclusive language and environments.
- Inclusive classroom and chapter strategies.

Educators and Students:

- Culturally relevant content curriculum.
- Content Delivery and Participation

Delivery – Educators and

Students:

- In-person as part of already scheduled events.
- On-demand through the web/app.
- Measurement, Reporting and Tracking

Data Needs:

- Demographics of students and teachers in agricultural education.
- State and organization inclu-

sion statements and existing policies.

Measuring Success:

- Pre and post-assessments of participants.
- Ongoing focus group follow-up.
- Do local ag programs represent their communities?

Outcomes

Training Sessions:

- Reach 10 percent of teachers and students.
- 70,000 students (based on 700,000 FFA members)
- 1,300 teachers (based on 13,000 agriculture teachers – AAAE NSD Study)

Five Years? Attitude Shift:

- Organization programs, policies and practices are equitable.

25 years? Systematic Change:

- More inclusive classroom and teacher preparation offerings.
- The ag program student population reflects community demographics.
- The teacher population reflects national demographic trends.
- NAAE and National FFA boards and staff reflect national demographic data.

Additional Task Force Comments:

- Investing more in teacher training may have a greater overall impact.
- Student voice is crucial.
- Encourage companies to bring diverse representatives to FFA and NAAE events.
- Bring back the H.O. Sargent Award.

- Offer scholarships and grants to implement inclusion, diversity, and equity strategies.
- Create state-level inclusion, diversity, and equity teacher ambassadors.
- Invest in the initiative by creating brand awareness and staff person.

Based on the task force recommendations, NAAE and National FFA have entered into a training and assessment contract with Millennium Learning Concepts, a consulting and training firm headed by Dr. Roger Cleveland. Dr. Roger Cleveland has been at the forefront of equity and inclusion for over a decade. He has facilitated the activities of high school diversity clubs and has served as a diversity advisor and as a moderator and presenter at over 85 various conferences promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Cleveland is currently a full professor in the School of Education at Kentucky State University and serves as the director of the Center for Research on the Eradication of Educational Disparities (CREED). One of Dr. Cleveland's most provoking questions is, "What identities do people need to leave behind to be in FFA or to become agricultural educators?" While the answers may vary by program, state, region, or organization, being honest and transparent are necessary for NAAE and National FFA to remain relevant.

In 2019, Dr. Cleveland and his associates presented 17 inclusion-related and research-based training sessions at various events across the country and engaged with more than 1,500 FFA members, agricultural educators, and NAAE and National

FFA staff. In addition to ongoing training, Dr. Cleveland is leading extensive organizational assessments of programs, policies, and practices to help NAAE and National FFA build long-term inclusion, diversity, and equity plans.

Current NAAE and National FFA inclusion, diversity, and equity practices in place or in-progress:

- Funding, staff, and time dedicated to the inclusion, diversity, and equity initiative.
- Audits of space and events to ensure accessibility for all.
- Modification of the FFA dress code to allow for gender neutrality.
- NAAE preservice programs have one person per bed policy for privacy.
- National FFA belief statement.
- Programming at new locations: MANRRS and Cultivating Change Summit.
- Fifty years of Women in FFA recognition throughout 2019 and 2020.
- Deliberate intent in showcasing FFA member and agricultural educator diversity.
- Dedicated programming at NAAE and National FFA events for inclusion, diversity, and equity focus to take place.
- State-level grant support to implement educator inclusion, equity and cultural competency training.

NAAE and National FFA know the stakes are high, and some may be skeptical of the process. We look forward to showing through our deeds and actions our steadfast commitment to creating welcoming or-

ganizations where all feel safe and celebrated as their authentic selves. Watch for ongoing updates in the Monday Morning Monitor and various communications from NAAE and National FFA.

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Ellen Thompson is a former agriculture teacher who now works on behalf of the National Association of Agricultural Educators and the National FFA Organization related to teacher recruitment and retention as well as inclusion, diversity, and equity.

