

A Shepherd Teaching Sheep to Fear Herd Mentality

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To provide an opportunity for youth to grow their individual knowledge, skills, and advocacy methods and find their place within the agriculture field through hands-on activities and leadership opportunities.

Goal 1: Facilitate a hands-on lesson or lab activity throughout each course at least once a week, that fill students with a sense of personal connection, capability, and comprehension to be determined through unit assessments and reflections.

Goal 2: Provide students with life and leadership skills through SAE and work based learning hour requirements each year they take classes in the agricultural education department. This will bolster community relationships and students skills through work hours, mentorship, and reflection assignments.

Goal 3: Provide a safe environment for students by implementing safety protocols and safety training sessions at the beginning of the quarter and for each unit to ensure the classroom is an injury free space allowing all students to feel secure.

From kindergarten on, we are taught to walk in a straight line with our peers and follow the leader. There's safety in numbers and the majority always wins. We have this way of romanticizing leadership and looking to those "above us" for the right answer, proper way of acting, and to limit the paths we have to choose from for our lives. This herd mentality is exactly what is crushing our creativing, driving our inequalities, and allowing our discrimination to exclude the "black sheep". As an educator, or shepherd if you will, I want my students to not be afraid of the unknown and their individuality, but instead, embrace it and use it to their advantage. Most importantly, I want them to be proud of what makes them different from the rest of the herd.

As an agricultural educator I have the opportunity to facilitate problem solving, creativity and hands-on learning that will help my students stray away from this limiting mentality. I will provide grand challenge questions for my students to analyze, community engagement and growth programming through FFA, classroom visits and industry tours. I expect my students to dive into the deep end of entrepreneurship through SAE and work based learning. With all this, I can set them up for individual success with team support. Knowing they will gain the most out of these lessons when I utilize Bloom's taxonomy's attitude, emotion, value and psychomotor domains through my pedagogy. Instead of lecturing and textbook lessons, my students will have real life experiences and hands-on learning activities to support the growth of their leadership and foundational skills. Because we as agricultural educators have this freedom, we can support our students in whatever way works best for them as individuals while also bringing greater success to the group.

Students within the agricultural education field are in need of individualized opportunities and open structure classes to provide them with the skills needed for their college and career preparation. These skills range from hands-on, technical, industry skills to interpersonal skills such as leadership, communication and teamwork. The students play a key role in gaining these skills and fulfilling their needs through the student-led FFA integrated program, organizing and being responsible for their SAE/work based learning, and advocating for themselves including their interests and needs within the classroom setting. Our courses and broader standard requirements allow for greater student selection of assessment types, course content and SAE industry area.

I chose the 4-H learning model as my process of instruction due to its open structure to be utilized whether I am teaching a lab course, lecture based, or FFA or SAE class where it is very student centered and individualized. This structure focuses on three key steps: Do, Reflect, and Apply. The most important portion of this is reflection because that is where the greatest learning, connection, and preparation for real world application happens. Whether it is a welding or leadership class we will take time after each class period for a short reflection. These can be personal inner reflections, group based, or class based and can happen in many different styles to best fit each student. This idea however, is more than just summarizing what we learned, but instead it is taking time for what you still wish to learn, how it applies to your life compared to your peers and how you can implement this new concept or skill every day. My vision allows my students to determine how lessons will affect their life and the choices they make. The real world application and learning from their peers' interpretations of content helps them realize that we can all be tied together and learn from one another while still being our own person with our own experiences and opinions.

A strong integrated Agriculture Education program is structured like a family. Relationships, traditions, and growth through communication, new experiences and getting outside the comfort zone are all traits of a healthy family unit. This family can be directly compared to a sheep herd. However, with a family unit there is greater opportunity for the diversity of identities compared to herd mentality. In its relatively short lifetime of around 110 years, agriculture education has grown from nothing by advocating for itself, the opportunities it provides its students, and the relationships it has built along the way. According to Doc Pete, this program prides itself on the traditions of the past, the relationships formed through the years, and the constant evolving with new generations, ideas, and forms of agriculture. This integrated programming allows for students to see the great support that is offered to them not only through their educators, but through the state and nation as a whole. It is through this support and pushing our students and peers to strive for excellence that they are able to gain the confidence needed to break the herd mentality and set off on their own great path. Knowing that their shepherd will be there, cheering them on and protecting them throughout their life if they even should stumble along this individualized path that our program has helped them find.

As an agricultural educator, or shepherd if you will, I will utilize my liberties within my classroom, SAE/work based learning, and integrated FFA program to provide the skills to my students to break this herd mentality that they have been taught in their core classes from their first day of school. By pushing my students out of their comfort zone and giving them individualized opportunities to prosper in their interest areas I can prepare them for their future, whatever that may look like. Through these lessons and experiences my students will take control of their education and not fear the future. They know that they will thrive on their own skills, work ethics, and talents with the comfort of knowing that I, their shepherd, will always be cheering them on. I want my students to not be afraid of the unknown and their individuality, but instead, embrace it and use it to their advantage. Most importantly, they should be proud of what makes them different from the rest of the herd.

References

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