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**SERVING STUDENTS IN AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Preparing to Serve Students with Exceptionalities

Students with special needs are a part of today's educational system including agricultural education. As agricultural education teachers, it is our responsibility to provide each and every student a quality education regardless of their needs. To what extent are special needs students enrolling in agricultural education programs?

In 2008 Watts asked West Virginia agricultural education teachers to identify the number of students with "exceptionalities" in their programs. Exceptionalities were defined as physical, mental, and socially maladjusted. Teachers identified a range of 0 to 5 students with physical disabilities in their classroom with an average of .68 students per teacher. The number of students with mental disabilities in agriculture classroom ranged from 0 to 51 students with an average of 7.69 students per teacher. Social maladjusted disabilities in the agriculture classroom ranged from 0 to 24 students with an average of 4.44 students per teacher. Watts (2008) also asked the teachers to identify the number of students with exceptionalities in their classroom that required an aide. The number ranged from 0 to 16 students with an average of .96 students per teacher.

How are teachers adapting their instruction to meet the needs of these students? A majority of the teachers (77.8%) had made adaptations to their classrooms to accommodate students with exceptionalities. Nearly the same number (60.9%) had adapted their laboratories to accommodate students with exceptionalities. These accommodations included: following IEPs and developing individualized instruction, modifying assignments, allowing extra time for tests and assignments, creating simpler projects,

reading exams to students, moving classroom and students around to accommodate students with exceptionalities, learning sign language, working with special education teachers, creating special groups for extra help, and extending time for assignments.

It is apparent that teachers are making accommodations to deal with students with exceptionalities. Were these teachers initially prepared to work with students with exceptionalities? How confident are they in their current abilities to teach students with exceptionalities? Less than one fourth of the teachers indicated they were prepared to work with physical (21.3%), mental (10.6%), and socially maladjusted (8.5%) exceptionalities when they started their teaching career. Nearly fifty percent of the teachers are confident in their abilities to work with physical (59.6%), mental (51.6%), and socially maladjusted (38.3%) exceptionalities at this stage of their teaching career.

Some general strategies a teacher may employ for teaching students with exceptionalities includes having the student:

- enter the classroom at the same time as the other students,
- be seated so that he/she can see and participate in all activities and so that other students and the teacher can interact easily with her/him,
- participate in classroom activities at the same time as the other students,
- make transitions from one activity to another at the same time as the other students,
- leave the classroom at the same

time as the other pupils,

- have his/her academic and social progress a constant focus of the program,
- be involved in class activities, e.g., asking and answering questions, group activities,
- be encouraged to behave the same way as the other pupils, e.g., remaining seated during instruction, and
- be assisted only when necessary with that assistance fading as soon as possible.

I encourage you to read the entire issue for additional suggestions on working with special needs students. A special thanks to Dr. Nancy Grudens-Schuck for her assistance in serving as the Theme Editor for the issue. I would also like to thank the authors who were willing to share their expertise with the profession.

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Dr. Harry N. Boone, Jr., is an Associate Professor at West Virginia University and Editor of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*.

CONTENTS

Theme: Serving Students in Agricultural Education with Special Needs

Editorial:

- Preparing to Serve Students with Exceptionalities.....2
by *Harry N. Boone, Jr., Editor*

Theme Editor Comments:

- Theme Editor Comments.....4
by *Nancy Grudens-Schuck*

Theme Articles:

- Growing Young Minds 5
by *Sarah Barmore Byrd and Rudy S. Tarpley*
- Making Agricultural Education a Special Education for All Learners..... 7
by *Ann M. De Lay and Mary A. Burden*
- Experiential and Inquiry-based Learning Literature Search 9
by *Brandi K. Phillips and Brian E. Myers*
- Three Circle Model of Inclusion Student, Parent, and Teacher
Success in Agricultural Education.....11
by *Monica D. Giffing and Brian Warnick*
- The Big Picture: IEPs, Parents, Teachers, and Aides 14
by *Michelle Greaud and Hannah Scherer*
- Active Student Response Strategies for Including ALL Students
in Ag Ed Classes..... 17
by *Shandra K. Pipkin, Monica D. Giffing, and Natalie A. Williams*
- Opportunities for Members with Special Needs
National FFA Organization..... 21
by *Jim Armbruster*
- Stop Treating Them So Special 24
by *Chris Livengood and Deborah A. Boone*

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Editor

Dr. Harry N. Boone, Jr., Associate Professor, Agricultural and Extension Education, West Virginia University, PO Box 6108, 2054 Agricultural Sciences Building, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506, Phone (304) 293-5451, FAX: (304) 293-3752.

E-mail: hnboone@wvu.edu

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Theme Editor Comments

by Nancy Grudens-Shuck

Schools have risen to the challenge of educating young people struggling with special needs in response to legislation, professional standards of the teaching profession, and research and practice. Agricultural education in public and private schools, together with the FFA, has experienced a “learning curve” associated with providing content in ways that serve youth. It seems every year, the details change with respect to school or area-level protocols. The “micro”-scene for special education changes rapidly. Even mandated protocols are typically under-funded. For example, when my son was diagnosed in 1997 at age 9 with Asperger’s Syndrome,

the label was dismissed by school professionals who had not heard of the term. Now in 2012, more change is apparent: nearly everyone knows Asperger’s Syndrome! Currently, a host of disorders may comprise 50% of students in our classroom and chapter. What’s a teacher to do?

This issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine* provides a snapshot of creative ways good teachers and association staff have structured to improve the classroom climate for students with disabilities. The examples explain how new and traditional activities of agriculture education can meet the needs of students of varying abilities. I was impressed by the broad thinking of the authors. Most stated how and why agricultural education

may provide an especially powerful environment for learning by students with disabilities. See if there is a fit with your program. Best wishes for a good summer.



Dr. Nancy Grudens-Schuck, the May-June Theme Editor, is an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education and Studies at Iowa State University.

Upcoming Themes

September - October *The CASE Initiative*

The Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education™ (CASE™) project has developed a structured sequence of agriculture courses and serves as a model for elevating the rigor and relevance of agricultural education. This issue will explore the successes of the CASE™ curriculum in agricultural education.

Theme Editor: Michael S. Retallick
Associate Professor
Agricultural Education and Studies
Iowa State University
206 Curtiss Hall
Ames, IA 50011-1050
Email: msr@iastate.edu
Phone: 515-294-4810
Fax: 615-963-5888

November - December *Successful Programs and Their Traditions*

There are many successful agricultural education programs across this nation. With success come traditions. In this issue agricultural education programs will share their successes and traditions.

Theme Editor: Rebecca Lawver
Assistant Professor
Department of Agriculture Systems Technology and
Education
College of Agriculture
Utah State University
2300 Old Main Hill
1498 N 800 E
Logan, Utah 84322-2300
Email: rebecca.lawver@usu.edu
Phone: 435-797-1254
Fax: 435-797-4022

Growing Young Minds

by Sarah Barmore Byrd and Rudy S. Tarpley

Many agricultural educators continue to develop new and innovative methods to reach 21st century students. However, if every student routinely expects information to be downloaded, updated, and delivered with startling speed across the globe—what can our curriculum do to compete? Granted, instant and unlimited access to information worldwide is a hard act to follow. We in agricultural education still have powerful ways to encourage students to invest in their own education. The question close to our hearts is: Can agricultural education apply the time-tested model of “learning by doing” to other learning settings? Colleagues in our College and state took on this challenge in 2010.

GROW Program

In the spring of 2010, Tarleton State University’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (Stephenville, Texas) partnered with Erath County’s “Solutions Toward Addiction Recovery Council” (STAR) to create a community-based, after-school garden program for at-risk youth. STAR is located in Stephenville, Texas and focuses on providing services to individuals afflicted by problems related to substance abuse. Target audiences include adolescents, pregnant or postpartum women, and driving offenders (DUI/DWI). The after-school garden program utilized work-based agriculture involvement to address serious unmet needs of members of our communities. The “Getting Ready for Our World” program (GROW) received permission to utilize Tarleton State University’s Horticulture

Center; complete with a traditional classroom and access to a propagation greenhouse, a tool shed, and a 40 x 50 foot plot of earth freshly tilled by the local Erath Antique Tractor Club. GROW’s curriculum was designed to use garden-based activities to provide, complement, and supplement education touching on healthy nutrition, human life processes, horticulture, shop basics, community involvement, and the role of agriculture in the students’ lives. The program was successfully implemented for three months; closing when Stephenville ISD released for summer vacation.

Factors for Success

The GROW program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students, parents, the students’ counselors, and parole officers. When determining why the program received positive feedback, many indicated that GROW offered a rich learning environment which encouraged students to engage in their own education. GROW implemented three important curriculum components: immersion, integration, and product. The program intentionally promoted students’ engagement.

Snapshot of GROW Activities

Every afternoon the GROW program began with a gathering of students and staff in the garden to weed and perform minor garden maintenance. Instructing the students to meet in the garden the moment they walked onto the premises provided opportunities for students to readily engage their senses, muscles, and “thinking energy” in the program. Students were encouraged to use “garden time” to (a) expend pent-up energy; (b) air complaints about

school, family or friends; and (c) focus on the program. The full attention and commitment of the students at the onset of each session enabled a successful transition from arrival to the delivery of the content lessons in the afternoon. Lessons usually incorporated images of insects and plants; instructional materials such as notepads and worksheets, and puzzles; and active facilitation by instructors of students’ questions, responses and brainstorming. The physical setting varied from: (a) classroom, (b) construction area, or (c) laboratory area, according to the skill or subject discussed for the day. Immediately following the lesson the students had the opportunity to immediately apply what they learned to an activity. Often, the activity provided an end-product from their work. Anticipation of learning about, and then creating, a product related to agriculture increased motivation.

GROW maintained student involvement with the natural environment mentally and physically; and thorough use of educational materials and construction tasks. Smells (olfactory) contributed to the experience. Sounds (aural) provoked thinking complementary to the curriculum. Textures (tactile) promoted investigation of the educational materials. Physical work (kinetic) produced individual awareness and focus. This robust engagement of the student appeared to generate a high number of on-topic questions, eased facilitation of thoughtful processing, and created more opportunities for emotional redirection when needed. For example, during one of the week’s discussions of composting basics, methods, and benefits, GROW students were asked to construct a compost bin. During this task the students were introduced



Participants working in the Tarleton State University GROW program.

to measuring techniques, cutting with saws, and diagrams of structures. After familiarizing the students with the assignment, they were guided to an area where lumber was stacked in a pile. To assess the amount of materials available for their construction project, the students sorted the lumber by length into separate stacks. Utilizing the building dimensions of the compost bins, the students then discussed which lumber should be cut or left uncut. Individual students “divvied up” pieces to cut, measured twice, cut their assigned pieces, and regrouped to discuss the next day’s construction. Several consequences of immersion materialized during this activity enhancing the overall experience and promoting assignment success. The environment consisted of a cemented patch surrounded by grass and metal buildings. The area was secluded from excessive distracting stimuli and contained assignment-only materials. The deliberate placement of the students in a setting equipped with task-specific elements helped maintain the students’ active participation in the assignment. Materials (lumber, saws, measuring tapes, pencils, and cutting trench) drew the focus of the

students as the “active” elements of their setting. Special characteristics of the materials, such as wood grains, saw teeth, or measuring tape mechanisms, directed wandering attention back to investigating material

mysteries, reducing the threat of task apathy. First hand examination of materials also created opportunities for cognitive reflection on the purposes or abilities of the material, which could be directed to the assignment, or used in “teachable moments.” As a result of the students being “surrounded” by their objective, questions and ideas tended to correspond with the task. Emotional outbursts and frustrations – typically displayed by students with challenging lives – could be channeled into productive use.

The second component utilized from GROW was the integration of educational materials. Every afternoon, a lesson was delivered by teaching content through images, discussion, examples, puzzles, PowerPoint™, and other sensory-engaging materials. Because participation in GROW did not require maintaining a grade or grade point average – or homework or studying – the curriculum challenged the students to process the educational content and directly apply new knowledge within an activity. After the students real-

ized the importance of the role of understanding content in successfully completing the activity, students increased efforts to absorb the content. The students’ ability to move forward likely would have been hampered if content was left out.

The Role of “Product”

“Product” is an important component to promote active student engagement in their personal education, as well as agricultural education. Psychological aspects such as self-esteem, self-empowerment, or the feeling of success are difficult for students in GROW to master. An end-product can represent a “goal-line” at the end of a task or serve as a tangible reward created from their hard work, effort, and skills. For example, by the end of the first day of constructing the compost bin, the students had learned

continued on page 27



Sarah Barmore Byrd is a graduate student in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at Tarleton State University.



Dr. Rudy S. Tarpley is the Department Head and Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Sciences at Tarleton State University.

Making Agricultural Education a Special Education for All Learners

by Ann M. De Lay and Mary A. Burden

Virtually every teacher education program provides or requires a course addressing students with special needs. However, such courses are often exposure-level and rarely carry with them deeper investigations into student challenges and teacher responsibilities that are unique (Aschenbrener, Garton & Ross, 2010). As a result, little is discussed in terms of how to modify the curriculum; or better yet, the learning environment. Teachers are left wondering how to make the entire program of classroom, FFA and SAE accessible to all learners.

Career and Technical Education coursework, of which agriculture is a part, has long been a popular choice for students with special needs (Wonnacott, 2001). Contained within its structure, agricultural education weaves together knowledge, skills and abilities to create opportunities for student success (Iverson, 1993; Talbert, Vaughn, Croom, & Lee, 2007). The hands-on, active learning strategies (Gaona, 2004) often in the form of cooperative learning or inquiry-based instruction, serves as the interface for providing these students their best chance at gaining academic competency and relevant work experience. Yet agriculture teachers struggle to bridge the gap between students' individual needs and the challenges of the technical learning environment.

Elementary to High School

During the early years of a child's education, parents may be a student's

greatest advocate. This is often easier for parents to do when students are in self-contained classrooms, staffed by one teacher. As students move into middle and high school, parents find communication to be more difficult. Students move from room to room throughout the day, have more teachers, and the school has a larger student population. These changes mean the adults on campus may not know individual students, and stu-

semble a resume if students are older. Create a template with segments such as: *I learn best when...*, *Things I excel in are...*, *Things which are difficult include...*, *When I _____, I need...*, *I want to learn more about...* Offer another section asking, "How can I, as your teacher, help you achieve these goals?" In this way, students can communicate immediate needs to the teacher long before reports from the Special Education department arrive.

Agricultural education is poised
to provide a quality experience for
students with special needs.

dents' needs can go unnoticed and unmet. Secondary teachers play a more significant role than they may realize when it comes to meeting learners' needs. Consequently, parents typically rely on teachers to serve as advocates in their absence. Due to its traditions and expectations, agricultural education has a unique opportunity to collaborate with parents and other colleagues on campus to make agricultural education a "special education" for all learners.

The following are tips from parents of special needs children to help agriculture teachers better meet their students' needs.

1. Assign a "Getting to Know You" Project

Have the entire class complete a "This is Me" assignment. It can re-

This activity can provide valuable information for lesson construction, delivery, and assessment. The document can also help agriculture teachers identify FFA and SAE opportunities for students to pursue from the moment they enter the program. Consider sharing the completed "resumes" with other teachers in the department and across campus, who work with these learners.

2. Make a Home Visit

Visiting the home of every student enrolled in the program has long been a tradition of the profession. The purpose of these visits is not to assess a project or drop a kid off following a field day but rather to allow the teacher to introduce herself and the program, discuss a student's four-year plan, and open the lines of communication. During the discus-

sion, teachers should ask parents if their child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP)/504/Behavior Support Plan (BSP), or other agreement regarding a disability; whether they are comfortable sharing the student's medication history, and elicit recommendations for addressing any unique needs and challenges the student may have. If parents have a copy of the student's current IEP/504/BSP, ask to view it; and if possible, make a copy and keep the document with the other home visit paperwork. While home visits are known for their ability to boost student retention, they encourage greater student engagement and participation because students feel valued by a teacher who takes the time to get to know them and their family.

3. Talk to the Psychologist or Counselor

Teachers do not always receive a list at the beginning of the year identifying the students with documented special needs. Such communication can take weeks or months. The delay significantly impacts students' ability to learn and perform at their best. Rather than wait, make an appointment with the school gatekeeper and work through each class roster, gathering copies of IEP/504/BSP documentation as you go. Students deserve the proactive approach.

4. Create an Email Habit

Making phone calls can be challenging, especially given an agriculture teacher's busy schedule. However, email can be sent any time, from a number of devices, to most parents and guardians. Ask parents if they would appreciate feedback on their students' progress on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Describe behaviors and how the student is progressing in their knowledge and skill development. Encourage parents to notify you when their child's medications

change and the possible side-effects (e.g., falling asleep, zoning out, irritability?).

5. Give 'em a Job to Do

As a class community, there are a myriad of tasks which need to be completed. Do papers need to be collected or returned? Do the classroom critters need feeding? Do the plants need watering? Identify specific tasks and match them to a student who needs his or her energy channeled. This strategy may seem simplistic but it yields great dividends. Delegating small but vital tasks teaches learners responsibility and the value of their contribution to the greater good. As students demonstrate their proficiency, consider additional or more complex tasks like helping with the lab demonstration. This supportive approach builds competence and confidence to master technical lessons and activities with multiple steps, requiring tools and equipment or a long-term commitment.

6. Make the Classroom a Place of Peace

The display of inappropriate behavior in the classroom can stress students and teachers alike. A situation left unchecked can adversely affect the learning of the entire class. Rather than ignore inappropriate behavior, encourage students with special needs to "take a break." Give them a moment to sit and think at their desk or dedicate a space in the room for doing so. Help students to understand breaks are not punitive; rather they are proactive in the sense they provide an opportunity to reflect and make better choices. Use this approach for laboratory and public settings as well so students have a familiar process for resetting and re-engaging.

7. One-on-One Chat

If questionable behavior or performance is observed, make an appointment with the student to discuss

concerns. Address how well they use the modifications, accommodations, or assistive devices documented by the IEP/504/BSP. Ask the student how to communicate better with their teachers about what they need. Agriculture teachers often have many things going on at one time. The rush of activity can cause us to forget the specifics of student's plan. A quick chat can refresh memories and refocus on the overall goal: student learning and success.

8. Invite Students with Special Needs to Participate

Agricultural education offers many opportunities for students to learn valuable life skills. Meet with the students and their parents to address interests and learning goals. Connect the individual student needs with the most appropriate experi-

continued on page 23



Dr. Ann M. De Lay is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education and Communication at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.



Mary A. Burden is a teacher in the Ceres Unified School District and Parent of a Student with Special Needs

Experiential and Inquiry-based Learning Literature Search

by Brandi K. Phillips and Brian E. Myers

School-based Agricultural Education (SBAE) is known for hands-on, experiential learning practices which are intended to provide students with technical skills that can later be applied to careers in agriculture-related industries. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs such as SBAE are essential in public school systems, particularly for those students with special needs. This population of learners may not pursue higher education beyond a secondary level; but despite challenges and difficulties with academia, they lead more productive lives, with a career, given the appropriate opportunities.

Experiential learning has been shown to be beneficial for students with special needs. In one study involving students with learning disabilities, activity-based instruction in which students were able to spend the majority of the class investigating science concepts in small groups was found to increase the amount of information the students remembered as well as their satisfaction with the lesson (Scruggs, Mastropieri, Bakken, & Brigham, 1993). Participation in FFA activities and Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) provide opportunities for experiential learning related to both content knowledge and life skills. Practical experiences to improve communication skills and team work are important for all students, but perhaps especially for students in special education populations. Agricultural education, typically combined with laboratory-based instruction, may in large part make

agricultural education especially fitting for students with special needs.

Teacher Preparation

Several studies show that agricultural educators may feel under-prepared to teach special needs children. Giffing, Warnick, Tarpley, and Williams (2010) surveyed close to 84% of agricultural educators in the State of Utah to determine their per-

One teaching strategy has been launched to the forefront of science education in recent years and may be applicable. The “inquiry-based method” leads students to solve problems versus solely memorizing and retaining information. Through inquiry, students can seek information and apply knowledge to specific situations. Agricultural educators often teach science-based content. Utilizing this

Experiential learning is beneficial for special needs students.

ceptions of having special needs students in their classrooms. Up to 73% of these teachers expressed willingness to include special needs children in their programs, but only 50% felt that they (the teachers) received appropriate support services. Only 23% felt that they had been adequately prepared through pre-service and in-service professional development. More opportunities for professional development in this area may be necessary to help teachers feel better prepared.

A different study surveyed teachers to determine how often teachers utilize recommended practices when teaching special needs students (Stair, Moore, Wilson, Croom, & Jayaratne, 2010). Among high-ranked strategies were (a) the emphasis on hands-on skills or activities, and (b) assigning tasks that focus on active learning. Once again, however, those surveyed felt that they lacked preparation to teach special needs students effectively.

method appropriately may assist students to grasp concepts on a deeper level versus a “recipe-style” laboratory exercise and memorizing facts. This corresponds again with the recommended practices Stair et al. (2010) found agricultural educators to be employing in their classrooms with special education students. Easterly and Myers (2011) tested the use of inquiry-based learning with ten educators who had students with, and without, Individualized Education Plans (IEP). A 10-12 week unit of inquiry-based instruction was used. Content knowledge was tested before and after the unit. This study found that there were no distinctions between IEP students and non-IEP students with respect to learning content knowledge. Although the study was a limited in scope, their findings demonstrate the idea that inquiry-based learning techniques may be appropriate and effective for use in an agriculture classroom inclusive of students with IEPs.

In order to implement inquiry-based techniques in the classroom, teachers must allow the students to take charge of their own learning. Students working in the lab should be given a problem and the tools necessary for creating a solution and permitted to collaborate with their peers in order to investigate the problem, with minimal procedural instruction. This collaboration is beneficial for special needs students who may be aided by peers, as well as perhaps an educational aide. Allowing the student the opportunity for hands-on, active learning fits previously mentioned successful teaching strategies for exceptional learners.

Maroney, Finson, Beaver, and Jensen (2003) made recommendations to make it more likely that inquiry-based instruction was successful with students with special needs: teacher preparation, classroom preparation, and student preparation. Teachers are advised to engage in inquiry-based projects and observe inquiry-based techniques in other classrooms. Classrooms should be safe environments that allow students to feel comfortable and encouraged when presenting ideas based on discovered evidence. All necessary materials and environmental accommodations should be made prior to the start of the lesson, so that frustration is minimized for students. Finally, it is recommended that teachers assist students to be prepared with necessary skills for the activity. Additional preparation time may be necessary, and modifications may be made, but it is imperative that the students are set up for success.

Self-selected Topics

Students may also research specific topics in agriculture and explain how they might use that information in practice. For example, while studying cattle handling practices, students

may be presented with several different types of materials for walls and floors. Students could be directed to investigate, and justify their choices, based on their research. Accommodations for exceptional students may be made based on recommendations in their IEPs. The instructor may allow students to choose their presentation style (oral, visual, or written) which allows students to use their individual talents to demonstrate their knowledge.

Future Research

More information is needed to effectively teach special needs students in agricultural education programs. Research is needed to determine what disabilities are most prevalent in agricultural education programs and what practices are most effective for increasing learning for students with various types of disabilities. By providing opportunities for hands-on and active learning, as can be provided through inquiry-based techniques, teachers can serve a wide range of students who may then benefit from agricultural education programs.

Resources

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Brandi K. Phillips is a Graduate Student in Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida.



Dr. Brian Myers is an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida.

Three Circle Model of Inclusion Student, Parent, and Teacher Success in Agricultural Education

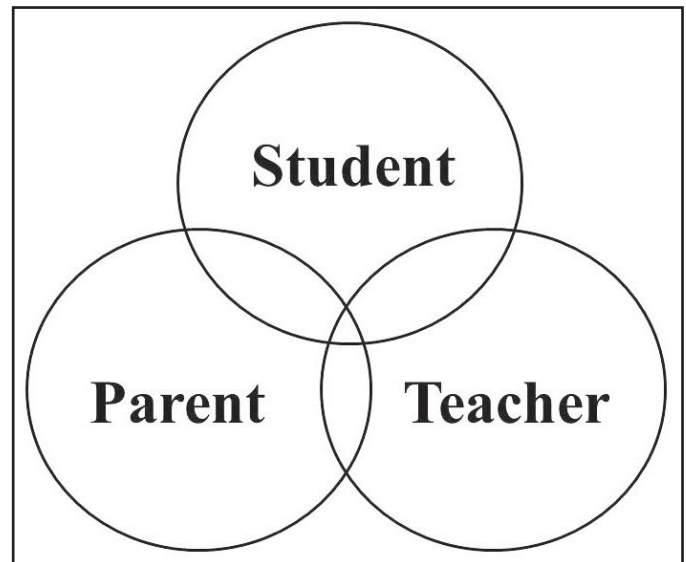
by Monica D. Giffing and Brian Warnick

Looking at Maddie on the initial day of her first agriculture class you wouldn't know she was any different from other students in the room. Yet, Maddie has Asperger's Syndrome, a disorder on the Autism Spectrum. Maddie struggles with abstract issues, taking concepts that are taught very literally. Loud noises and changes to routines can cause Maddie to react in unexpected and unpredictable ways. Social interaction can be a challenge for her. At first she was hesitant to get involved, questioned why agriculture was important to her and to her educational experience, and struggled with the concept of being part of a leadership organization. Finding out this information about a student can be intimidating for a teacher. An agriculture teacher is expected to engage every student in a program consisting of classroom and laboratory learning, a supervised agriculture experience (SAE), and leadership through FFA. But how fully do we embrace this notion of inclusion when it comes to students with special needs?

Dormody, Seevers, Andreason, and VanLeeuwen (2006) found that, on average, 19% of students in agricultural education classrooms in New Mexico had special needs and had an educational guide called the "Individualized Education Plan" (IEP). According to national data collected by the U.S. Department of Education in 2005, 18 percent of high school graduates with disabilities were enrolled in agricultural education courses compared to 11.5 percent of all graduates. For students with disabilities, the components of classroom, SAE,

and FFA are just as important as for students who are not on IEPs or another type of special education program. Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, and Mack (2002) suggested that public education is falling short in preparing students with special needs to transition from high school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. As part of the solution, they recommended that public schools make certain special education students "have access to the full range of secondary education curricula and programs" (p. 522), including community-based work experience, vocational education, and service learning opportunities. Agricultural education has the ability to provide opportunities for students in each of these areas through the complete program model. However, in order for students with special needs to be successful in all areas of the program, a strong relationship must be built between the student, the parents, the agricultural educator, and the special education instructor.

A study of Utah agriculture teachers (Giffing, Warnick, Tarpley, & Williams, 2009) indicated that agriculture teachers are willing to include students in their agricultural education programs, but often lack the skills and knowledge to do so successfully. Inclusion success can be defined in many ways and varies based on the



student and their needs, the goals of the parents, and attitude of the teachers toward inclusion. Including students with special needs fully into a complete program of agricultural education can be overwhelming but it may also provide an amazing opportunity for all involved. You have to basically "grab the bull by the horns" and go for it. It is our obligation to provide a quality education to all students and make a positive difference in their lives.

Classroom

On the outset, classroom inclusion appears to be the easiest of the three components of agricultural education to successfully implement. However, it can be the most challenging. Adam is one of our students with Down Syndrome. He loves animals and so enrolled in an animal science course. Although Adam could not be expected to fully grasp highly scientific concepts or be examined using typical end-of-unit assessments, he could be provided with alternative activities to learn as well as alternative assessments to measure the in-



• **Implement a team approach.** Parents and special education teachers play an important role in the success of students in the classroom. The key strategy is frequent and open

crease in his understanding.

In order for a student like Adam to be successful, the student must trust the teacher and feel safe and valued in the classroom. A few things a teacher might consider include the following:

- **Make simple modifications to teaching strategies.** Teachers can incorporate guided notes and worksheets to organize and simplify the learning process as well as to increase focused participation in learning activities. Using response cards or other student response systems allows teachers to quickly check student understanding of concepts. Choral response mechanisms also increase opportunities for students to respond and receive immediate feedback while improving engagement.
- **Make all students part of your class.** Teachers should specifically ask students to participate, partner them in all activities with their peers, and provide opportunities for them to work in small groups. Above all, students should not be allowed to sit idle and unengaged in the learning process.

communication between all parties. This includes regular participation and proactive involvement by the agriculture teacher in IEP meetings followed by timely and valid feedback on IEP goal attainment achievement and concerns.

In Adam's case his success was measured by his level of engagement in the classroom, especially application of concepts related swine production as demonstrated through his market hog project.

SAE

After five months of enrollment in the agricultural education program, another student in our program, Maddie, decided she wanted to raise a market hog for the junior livestock show. She was anxious around the pigs, but at the same time couldn't stay away from the barn. A major challenge was the first tagging and vaccination day. Maddie became upset because her pig would receive an injection. A life lesson was provided through comparing the immunizations she received as a child to help protect her from disease to the vaccinations she would give the pig. She developed enough courage to administer the injection herself.

Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) allows students to explore career interests and apply classroom knowledge to real world situations. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (Public Law 101-476) and the IDEA amendments of 1997 (Public Law 105-17) includes specific requirements for incorporating "transition plans" IEPs for students with disabilities – no later than age 14. Students with special needs can meet this through a strong SAE. The following should be considered:

- **The SAE must be of interest to the student.** Exposing students with special needs to a variety of options and allowing them to see firsthand the success of other students in the program can help them select SAEs that best match their interests.
- **Consider resources available.** Parents and special education teachers must be shown the validity of the hands on application to the curriculum.
- **Review potential career interests.** Students may discover alternative interests that can assist in transitioning them long term.

Students with disabilities, such as Adam and Maddie, have found great success in SAEs, particularly in raising market animals at the school laboratory. The life lessons learned are irreplaceable and range from money and time management to increased confidence and skill development. Maddie's lessons included increased self confidence, increased ability to communicate, and appreciation of agriculture. Maddie showed her market hog in a large junior livestock show, participating in the market class and showmanship, and received a blue ribbon.



FFA

FFA leadership opportunities are fundamental to the success of all students in agricultural education. The ability to make this work for students with special needs is about understanding the student and their needs. Early communication with students with special needs and their parents is critical. Building an individualized FFA leadership plan for each student can be a good start as well. Helping these students feel part of the FFA chapter can start by including them in simple chapter activities, putting them on a Career Development Team, encouraging them to attend leadership workshops, and traveling to state and national convention. Be sure to have an understanding of the parents' involvement specifically in relationship to travel.

Maddie's first FFA travel experience was full of the unexpected challenges. When she attended workshops she became agitated and stated that she was no longer interested in being at the leadership conference

or be member of the FFA. Through commitment of the teacher, parents, and special education department we discovered ways to make traveling for Maddie successful. Social Stories™ played a major role in the student success in FFA. Social Stories™ are a strategy devised by Carol Gray in 1991 (Gray & Garand, 1993) to help individuals with autism understand appropriate social protocol.

Through the involvement of her mother and by having her mother's support, Maddie was able to participate first in a small activity until she became more comfortable in participating in the leadership component.

This process started with a pumpkin carving contest in October, followed by the state leadership conference in December. By March, Maddie participated in the state FFA convention talent show, singing a solo in front of 1,500 people.

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Monica D. Giffing is an Agriculture Teacher at Springville High School, Springville, UT.



Dr. Brian Warnick is an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Systems Technology and Education, Utah State University

The Big Picture: IEPs, Parents, Teachers, and Aides

by Michelle Greaud and Hannah Scherer

This article provides advice for working with students with special needs, and their parents, based on personal and professional experience of the co-authors. Michelle Greaud is the parent of a child with special needs. She also has a Master's degree in Special Education and has worked with students with special needs as an aide in a high school setting. Dr. Hannah Scherer has three years of experience as a classroom science teacher at an independent high school for students with executive function disorders including, but not limited to, high-functioning autism, anxiety disorders, and non-verbal learning disabilities. She is currently an assistant professor of Agricultural and Extension Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This multi-faceted view will work in the agriculture classroom as well as general education and other career and technical education settings.

Our Stance

People with disabilities constitute our nation's largest minority group. It is also the most inclusive and most diverse: both genders and any sexual orientation; all ages, religions, socioeconomic levels, and ethnicities are represented in the "group" we call disabled (Disability). Yet people who have been diagnosed with disabilities are different from one another. The only thing they may have in common is being on the receiving end of societal misunderstanding, prejudice, and discrimination. Furthermore, this largest minority group is the only one which *any person can become part*

of, at any time! Some join at birth—others in the split second of an accident, through illness, or during the aging process. If and when it happens to *you*, will you have more in common with others who have disability diagnoses or with family, friends, and co-workers? How will you want to be described? How will you want to be treated? Here are thoughts based on our own, multi-faceted experiences.

Students and Teachers

In a perfect world, all students would be encouraged to strive to express their highest potential. Research indicates that students will attempt to achieve what is expected of them (Dieker, 2001; Graham, 2001). It is the teacher's responsibility to set appropriate expectations for their students and to guide them on their path to success. When working with students with disabilities, this can prove difficult because each case (i.e., student) is unique. A classroom teacher may not have the experience to feel confident in setting expectations. Parents can be a valuable resource in this endeavor and we present some advice for working with them based on our experiences.

Parent's Perspective: Strategies that Work

From a parent's perspective, there are several strategies and suggestions that first-author Greaud (Michelle) has found helpful as her son, a child with a disability, progresses through school. First and foremost, as a parent she believes that it is her responsibility to be her son's strongest advocate. Michelle has been upfront with teachers about her son's condition. Because his syndrome is so rare, Michelle provides each of his teach-

ers and his aide with a brochure that includes a summary about the syndrome. Michelle feels that information helps everyone who works with her son to understand him a little better. His teachers have developed communication notebooks that go back and forth to school every day with her son. The notebooks readily provide Michelle with information – and she can provide timely information back to the teachers and aide. The "notebook" has taken different forms over the years, depending on what worked best at the time. Sometimes it has been used to write short notes back and forth about the type of day her son had at school. The notebook has also enabled Michelle to share when different situations (good or bad) are occurring at home. The notebook can also be used as a travelling behavior chart to mark good things her son has done at school.

Recently, Michelle's son's special education teacher developed a "catch him being good" strategy that has been implemented both in the general education and the special education classrooms. Her son has struggled with behavior issues lately. Teachers began to reward her son when he exhibits good behavior for a predetermined amount of time. The reward right now is one M&M (yes, the candy!). While one M&M may not seem like much of a reward to many children, to him it surpasses almost any other reward. That's the key to effective rewards: what matters to the youth.

Talking Points: First Person

It is crucial to use what we call, "people-first" language when talking about someone with a disability.

Using people-first language puts the person before the disability and describes the condition a person has, not who a person is. As a parent, Michelle thinks people-first language is important for teachers to use because it conveys to her that people view her son as a person and that they do not just look at his disability. Some examples of people first language (based on People) are included in Table 1.

Aide or Educational Assistant: Issues and Opportunities

While working as an aide, Michelle sometimes saw students with special needs not being encouraged as much as their peers. As educators, we should encourage all of our students to succeed to the best of their ability. In regards to a student’s “Individualized Education Program” (IEP) meeting – which guides instruction for some special needs students under rules associated with the American Disability Act (ADA) – it is helpful to tell whomever coordinates the meeting ahead of time that you (the teacher, the aide) need to attend. By actively participating in the development of the student’s IEP, you can help ensure that accommodations for your class are considered.

The Agriculture Classroom

It is especially important for teachers and aides of students in the agricultural classroom to be present throughout each IEP meeting because the hands-on nature of class activities may require specific accommodations. For example, one accommodation may be “supervision while using tools.” Once back in the classroom, make sure that you plan ahead so that these accommodations are then followed. It is also important to explicitly follow the IEP. For example, if the IEP lists “oral testing always” make sure that is done *each* time you

Table 1
Examples of People First Language

People first language (YES)	Labels and stereotypes (NO)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People or individuals with disabilities. • An adult who has a disability. • A child with a disability. • A person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The handicapped. • The disabled.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People or individuals without disabilities. • Typical kids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal people or healthy individuals. • Atypical kids.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with intellectual and developmental disabilities. • He/she has a cognitive impairment. • A person who has Down Syndrome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mentally retarded; retarded people. • He/she’s a Down’s kid; a Mongoloid; a Mongol.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who has autism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An autistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with mental illness. • A person who has an emotional disability. • A person with a psychiatric illness or disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mentally ill; the emotionally disturbed. • Is insane; crazy, demented; psycho.. • A maniac; lunatic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who has a learning disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He/she is learning disabled.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is deaf. • He/she has a hearing impairment or loss. • A man or woman who is hard of hearing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deaf.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is deaf and cannot speak. • Who has a speech disorder. • Uses a communication device. • Uses synthetic speech. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is deaf and dumb. • Mute.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is blind. • A person who has a visual impairment. • Man or woman who has low vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blind.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who has epilepsy. • People with a seizure disorder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An epileptic. • A victim of epilepsy.

test the student. If it says “at student’s request,” ask the student. Educators are also asked to “identify several areas of concern you see for that student” (e.g., poor preparation, poor concentration, lack of cooperation).

Also make sure to communicate something positive. If you are truly interacting with students in a positive manner, it should not be difficult to “find” something positive.

Michelle has talked to several educators over the years and has compiled a list of some of the strategies they use when working with students with special needs that would also fit an agriculture classroom.

- For group projects, ensure that everyone has responsibilities.
- For tests, use some short answer or oral exams instead of essay and word banks.
- When everyone reads aloud, adjust which part is read based on student ability.
- Provide a set of expectations and rules for all students. It often helps to have students contribute to the list.
- Reinforce “good” behaviors.
- Use handouts when giving a presentation.
- Integrate social skills development into your classroom.

Teacher’s Perspective: Working Productively with Parents

Second author Scherer (Hannah) speaks to the role of the teacher when working with parents. The culture of the school in which Hannah taught presumed that all teachers were involved in writing IEP goals, and communicated directly with parents. A similar culture may or may not prevail in your school or district.

For a classroom teacher without a special education degree, establishing credibility with parents can sometimes be a difficult task. Parents may be wary of your ability to meet the needs of their child. Hannah found that demonstrating that she was knowledgeable about the details of a student’s IEP (needs, goals, evaluation processes) and providing concrete examples of successful accommodations built parents’ confidence. She also relied on parents as a resource. When she had challenges modifying an assignment, a quick

chat with a parent could provide a wealth of ideas and also show the parent that there is an investment in their child’s education.

Parents differed in their abilities to interact with school faculty and staff. Some parents forgot to attend conferences – or, conversely, wanted Hannah to email them on a daily basis. The main challenge is finding a realistic balance. She notes that it is also too easy to rush to judgment when a parent appears uninterested. Parent absence from the school process can be frustrating, but there may be constraints such as multiple jobs, raising additional children with special needs, or they may have a disability themselves.

Other parents want to be highly involved in school – but the reality of teaching frequently limits the amount of time in a day to communicate. The important thing is to be realistic and don’t commit to a schedule that you can’t keep.

Also consider that parents who want to be involved can be a wonderful “opportunity.” For example, if there is someone at home willing to provide more practice in skill building, utilize that resource. When possible, send information home about what activities your students are doing in your class along with suggestions about how this could be reinforced at home. Hannah agrees with Michelle that a quick note home about something that went well in the classroom can show that you are invested in the success of their child (and paying attention!). This helps to build the relationship with parents. Hannah’s school, for example, implemented a “strength inventory” for all of their students as part of parent-teacher conferences. This was a great way to start the meeting and helped parents to be more open to discussions about challenge areas.

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Michelle Greaud is the Office Supervisor in Agricultural and Extension Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and a parent of a child with special needs.



Dr. Hannah Scherer is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Active Student Response Strategies for Including ALL Students in Ag Ed Classes

by Shandra K. Pipkin, Monica D. Giffing, and Natalie A. Williams

Has this ever happened to you? You prepared a grand lesson, diligently delivering it, when you discover that Johnny X. is playing with his i-Pod; Suzy Y. is dozing off; Marco G., is doodling in the margins of his notebook; and Caroline (who is listening) raises her hand every time a question is asked. Sound familiar? Unfortunately, this is often the experience of teachers, including Mrs. Giffing (co-author). This is why Giffing decided to find something more.... and she did. Through the use of *active student response* her classroom climate, student engagement and achievement have changed. This article will provide evidence-based alternatives to the scenario.

Students with Disabilities in CTE

Students with disabilities are active participants in Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. There are 12 occupational educational CTE areas, and among those are Agriculture and Natural Resources, which ranks 4th of the 12 for the total number of students with disabilities who take these courses. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005) 98% of students identified as having a disability participate in CTE courses. The high rate of students with disabilities taking Agricultural and Natural Resource classes reveals that it is essential that strategies be developed to meet the needs of students as they participate in the CTE classroom.

Active Students

The good news for teachers is that there are research-based prac-

tices and strategies that can be used to improve academic achievement for all students. We will focus on "Active Student Responding (ASR)." Increasing ASR requires educators to develop ways for students to be engaged during instruction via (a) choral responding, (b) response cards, or (c) guided notes. These techniques increase student participation and academic performance. ASR results in an increase in correct responses to questions and a decrease in off-task and disruptive behaviors (Haydon, Mancil, & Van Loan, 2009). In addition to meeting the needs of students with disabilities, ASR benefits students without disabilities (Heward, 1994; Konrad, Joseph & Evenleigh, 2009; Randolph, 2007).

ASR has predominantly been used in core education classes (e.g., English, math, science), leaving secondary education CTE teachers and students, especially those with disabilities, isolated from the benefits of ASR.

ASR in the Classroom

We understand that it can be a struggle to implement new strategies. However, ASR is easy to implement, is cost effective for teachers, and has proven to be successful with students.

It is not that teachers are failing to find opportunities for students to respond, they may just be using techniques that are outdated or tend to mainly engage high-achieving students. Low achieving students typically are more apprehensive when asked to answer a question they may not know (Maheady, Mallete, Harper, & Saca, 1991). This brings us to the first benefit of utilizing ASR in the

classroom. This strategy employs a way for teachers to present a question or prompt to the whole class requiring all students to answer in unison via choral response, a response card, or filling in their guided notes. Heward, Courson and Narayan (1989) point out that another benefit of using ASR in the classroom is that "Academic achievement is more likely to occur in classrooms in which students are actively engaged with instructional materials on which they have a high success rate" (p. 72). Another benefit is demonstrated by the ease; teachers are able to seamlessly include ASR within teaching time; the increased pace manages to maintain student's attention, and keeps students' interested in the content (Narayan, Heward, Gardner III, Courson, & Omness, 1990). Even more, preparing the materials requires minimal cost (Blackwell & McLaughlin, 2005).

Choral Responding

Learning is a process that continually changes with each individual student. Knowing this creates the need for teachers to differentiate their teaching. One way to do this is by changing the ways that teachers require their students to respond in class. Rather than using a format in which the teacher asks a question and then calls on individual students to respond, *choral response* asks students to respond simultaneously. Choral response results in increased correct responses, and on-task behaviors while inversely decreasing disruptive behaviors (Haydon, et al., 1994). Choral response is appropriate for curriculum that has one correct and fairly short (1-3 words) answer

(Heward, 1994). The idea of having all students responding simultaneously is “not a new idea” (Heward, Courson, & Narayan, 1989, p. 72); but its use is limited in most classrooms, particularly at the secondary level (Heward et al., 1994).

When conducting choral response it is important to inform the students about the type of response needed (e.g., “I am going to ask a few questions and you will respond either ‘True’ or ‘False’ *all together* on my signal.”). When implementing choral response, be sure and provide time for a “ thinking pause,” determined by the complexity of the question. Then give a signal to the class to respond together. Another important aspect of choral response is not only to maximize the number of opportunities for students to respond but to keep the duration of your choral response time between “5 to 10 minutes,” repeating a few times throughout the class (Heward, et al., 1989).

Voice and Movement

Choral response can be combined with “motion moment” (Reardon & Derner, 2004). As learners repeat the word or phrase, create a physical motion to encourage a connection with the concept. For example, when teaching about plant stem vascular systems – xylem and phloem – ask students to stand up while you explain xylem. Then, sit down while you describe phloem. After the first demonstration, have them complete their notes and then repeat the choral response *and motion moment* several times to enhance retention of “Xylem Up, Phloem Down” (see Table 1).

Response Cards

This technique capitalizes on benefits of actively increasing the engagement of all students in the learning process. Response cards, in one

Table 1

Sample Script for Using Choral Response for Plant Systems

Teacher Says/Does	Students Say/Do
“What tissue of the plant is responsible for carrying water to the leaves?”	While moving to a standing position students respond “Xylem Up.”
“What tissue of the plant is responsible for carrying food produced?”	While moving to a sitting position students respond “Phloem Down.”
“What tissue of the plant is responsible for carrying food to the rest of the plant?”	While remaining seated students respond “Phloem Down.”
“What tissue of the plant carries nutrients from the roots to the leaves?”	While moving to a standing position students respond “Xylem Up.”
“Now for review...What goes down?”	While moving to a sitting position students respond “Phloem Down.”
“What goes down?” (If students stand up on accident say, “Don’t get tricked!” Remember Xylem Up, Phloem Down.)	While remaining seated students respond “Phloem Down.”
“What goes up?”	While moving to a standing position students respond “Xylem Up.”
“Water and nutrients?”	While remaining in a standing position students respond “Xylem Up.”

form or another, have been around for over three decades, and are continually showing an increase in quiz/test/essay scores, as well as on-task behavior and a decrease in disruptive behaviors (Randolph, 2007). It is similar to choral response, wherein all students respond simultaneously to questions or prompts from the teacher. Response cards differ, because the students’ method for responding verbally transforms into either a *short response* on an erasable board (write-on response card) or using a “pinch card” (Heward et al., 1996) by marking a preselected answer with a clothespin on a reusable card (preprinted response card) to the teacher (Randolph, 2007).

This method provides students with the opportunity to respond during lecture time when a question is

asked by the teacher. The teacher poses the question, provides a thinking pause for students to write a response or “pinch” one, and then gives a signal for students to respond (e.g. “Cards Up!”) (Heward et al., 1996). Utilizing response cards provides a clear canvas for teachers to see whether or not students are grasping the concepts by providing immediate and accurate feedback (Maheady, Michielli-Pendl, Mallette, & Harper, 2002) (see Figure 1).

Guided Notes

Students have been taught that keeping notes is one way to keep track of what has been taught in the class and what may be on tests. Note taking is not always associated with fun and excitement. In fact, students tend to get lost trying to figure out

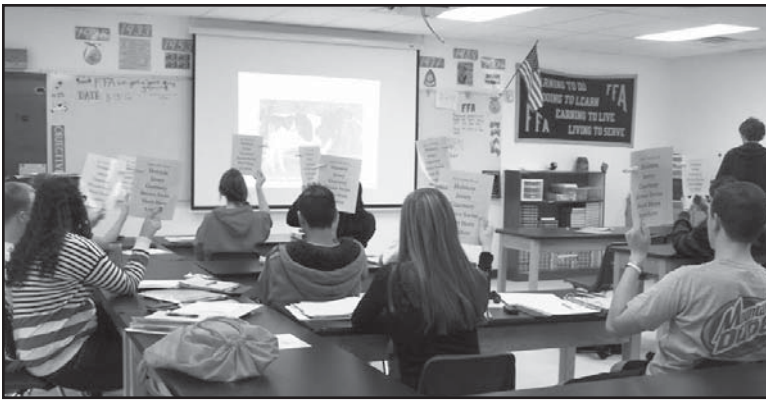


Figure 1: Mrs. Giffing’s class using response cards.

what is important to write down – turning this method into a frustrating experience (Barbetta & Skaruppa, 1995; Stringfellow & Miller, 2005). When using a traditional form of note taking, students with disabilities may run into problems. They often miss key concepts; fall behind due to the pace of the lesson; and have difficulty interpreting their own notes, leaving them unprepared for future assessments on required content.

This brings us to the evident need to changing how notes are taken. Guided notes are designed to keep students more engaged and cognizant about important aspects of a lecture by requiring only a limited amount of note taking by the students. This results in students actively listening for key words, concepts, etc. by the teacher and then writing down the few words in the guided notes blanks returning quickly back to listening to the teacher once more (Montis, 2007). It is important to note that this strategy has been shown to be more effective when utilized with either choral response or response cards (Konrad, Joseph, & Itoi, 2010).

Summary

Students with disabilities are attending Agricultural Education classes. The success of these students in a general education classroom relies heavily on the use of active student

engagement approaches. Using ASR strategies continue to provide exponential benefits because as you use them within your classroom they will benefit

all students. Table 2 provides a summary for each ASR strategy discussed in this article; for additional information see the references.

Considering the scenario that was shared at the beginning of the article, this is what Mrs. Giffing has to say now about having active student response in her classroom:

Using a variety of strategies

like those suggested have been a huge advantage to me and all of my students...Some teachers tend to believe that these specific accommodations/strategies become extra work for them...when in reality it is a benefit for all. We are not encouraging that you only use these for the students with special needs but for all learners. Why wouldn't you allow everyone to use guided notes? Tactics such as these create a learning advantage for all students and can be used across the board and increase engaged students in your classroom.

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Table 2

Techniques for increasing active engagement during group instruction.

Technique	Overview
Choral Response	Rather than having students take individual turns responding to teacher questions, the teacher poses a question, gives the class a signal to respond in unison, and then provides immediate feedback on the students group response (Heward, 1994).
Write-on Response Cards	The teacher poses a questions or problem to the class, gives students time to write a response on a small dry erase board, gives a signal for students to hold up their responses simultaneously, and then provides feedback to the class (Heward, 1994; Randolph, 2007).
Pre-printed Response Cards	The teacher poses a question or problem to the class, and students select and hold up a response card from a set of teacher-made cards and hold up that card when the teacher gives the signal (Heward, 1994; Randolph, 2007).
Guided Notes	During teacher-led instruction/lecture, teachers provide students with guided notes, “teacher-prepared handouts that ‘guide’ a student through a lecture with standard cues and prepared space in which to write the key facts, concepts, and/or relationships” (Heward, 1994, p. 304; see also Konrad, Joseph & Eveleigh, 2009; Konrad, Joseph, & Itoi, 2011).

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Shandra K. Pipkin is a graduate student at Weber State University.



Monica Giffing is an Agriculture Teacher at Springville High School, Springville, UT.



Dr. Natalie A. Williams is an Assistant Professor in the Jerry and Vickie Moyes College of Education, Weber State University.

Opportunities for Members with Special Needs

National FFA Organization

by Jim Armbruster

Providing service and engagement opportunities—regardless of a member’s abilities or disabilities – is a major responsibility that the National FFA Organization (FFA) is committed to fulfilling. Enacting the “American with Disabilities Act” is part of our role in offering equitable experiences for every member attending, or participating in, all national level activities.

FFA is dedicated to working in partnership with local advisors to ensure that our members with special needs are provided these opportunities, and also to work so that members have a positive and satisfying learning experience. In this process we must recognize that there are two key situations (1) members who participate in general activities (Washington Leadership Conference, The National FFA Convention & Expo or State President’s Conference) and, (2) members in competition activities (SAE-based awards, CDE, Agriscience, National Chapter and National Officer Election Process).

General Activities, Degree Ceremonies or Other Activities Sponsored and Organized by FFA:

During the registration process for all noncompetitive activities the advisor or the member will be provided the opportunity to *request special needs accommodations* for the member’s disability as outlined by the Americans with Disabilities Act. When registering for an activity, FFA requests *nonspecific information* – mostly related to accommodations – about the member. Disclosure of the disability itself is not asked for, or

required, at this point in the process. The *FFA Special Needs Specialist* contacts the teacher, parent or member prior to the event to now gather specific information, including but not limited to the medical diagnosis related to the request. The data collected during the registration process and in subsequent conversations with the advisor, member or parent are kept in the *strictest of confidence*, with only the FFA Special Needs Specialist (in some cases, a qualified third party), having access to the details. The qualified third party is typically called in to ensure that FFA follows ADA requirements, while providing the best possible experience for the member. After a member’s accommodations for FFA events have been determined, the specifics will be outlined in a letter to the advisor, member, parent or guardian, and FFA staff responsible for the program, event, or activity. *No information related to the medical diagnosis* will be provided to FFA staff responsible for program, event or activity operations.

Providing accommodations for noncompetitive events is the responsibility of FFA – and the member’s home school or state organization. During the process to determine level and type of accommodations, the FFA Special Needs Specialist and the advisor will discuss and determine the level of financial responsibility incurred by both FFA and the local school system or state association. For members with disabilities, the school system may receive additional financial support through state or federal funding. For example; when accommodating a member using a wheelchair or other mobility device, the local school system or parents are

responsible for securing transportation to and from the event. Once the member arrives at the event location, it is the responsibility of FFA to ensure that all facilities are ADA compliant; and, if the event or activity includes travel from the primary site to other locations, that appropriate transportation is provided.

The deadline for requesting accommodations will be the close of the registration process which is normally *10 business days* prior to the event. Earlier is better! For WLC, the request must be made 10 business days before the start of the week that the participant will be attending. Requests made after the deadline or onsite requests will be reviewed by the compliance team. However, FFA makes no guarantee that we can secure and provide the requested accommodations for a late request.

Competitive Events, Activities or Award Programs Organized by FFA

For our competing members who have a need for special accommodations, FFA has a different formal operational policy and procedure for requesting accommodations from General Activities. The policy and accommodation request forms can be found as part of *each program, event or activity web page* located at www.ffa.org.

For competitive activities, FFA is charged with providing accommodations that provide *a level playing field* for all event participants. Following are summary steps that explain the process and implementation. For full text please visit www.ffa.org and download “*National FFA*

Organization's Policy and Procedure for Special Needs Accommodation." Note that special needs accommodations cannot *fundamentally alter the event or program* curriculum. Accommodations are provided only to give the member a fair playing field and the best possible opportunity to experience success. A member who is granted accommodations must be *otherwise qualified* to participate in the event, activity, award program, or interview process.

1. Members qualifying for national competition must submit the application called *Requests for Special Needs Accommodation for National FFA Programs*. Links to this application can be found at www.ffa.org on the links to the programs. This application must be completed and *signed by teacher, student, parent and state leadership*. Completed and signed applications must be submitted to FFA by **August 15**, prior to the national convention where they will be competing. Applications received after **August 15** will be reviewed; however FFA cannot guarantee that any accommodations will be made.
2. After the application is received, FFA staff will review the document. If valid evidence is provided on the application, the advisor will be contacted to secure specific information and medical documentation of the member's disability and need for accommodations from the member's legal guardian. The request for additional information and medical documentation will be provided in *checklist form*. It is designed to serve as *the cover page for the additional documentation*. Members, parents (or guardian) and advisors will have *two weeks from when the Special Needs*

Checklist is received to forward any additional documentation to FFA.

3. Once all the documentation has been compiled and sent to FFA, documentation for each request will be reviewed by the Special Needs Specialist and a team of independent reviewers that are accredited in special needs assistance. Then, FFA will determine what accommodations are needed for the participant in their event. In some cases, the reviewers may recommend that no accommodation is needed. Once the participant's accommodation "status" is determined, the advisor, parent or guardian, and participant will be notified of the type of accommodation (or if none) will be provided for each event. The advisor and participant will receive a list of accommodations, and responsibilities, that they must sign and return. This action assists all to understand obligations in the process.
4. FFA program staff will be given *a list of names and accommodations* for every participant approved to receive special needs assistance or accommodations. FFA staff and/or event staff, however, will *not view* any of the documentation. They will only be made aware of the accommodation. Event staff and FFA staff will recruit a core of volunteers to help facilitate the accommodations. Before the start of the event or activity, the participant who has been approved for special needs assistance must *check in with FFA or event staff* in charge. At that time they will also check in any special equipment, or connect with services they are provided as a part of the accommodation.

FFA holds the responsibility to provide needed accommodations *once the member checks in* at the competition location. The exception is if the member needs specialized personal medical or mobility equipment. In these situations the member would utilize their own equipment.

Experience from Past Years

During the seven years that FFA has utilized these processes, there have been more than 25 members who have provided the necessary information and have been granted accommodations. Accommodations have included: (a) enlarged printed materials and scorecards; (b) additional time to complete a task; (c) equipment that would magnify testing materials; (d) special transportation to transport a member to field-based event sites; (e) staff to read aloud materials and exams to the participant; (f) use of American Sign Language interpreters to translate instructions; and (g) allowing a family member to be in the event area and maintain a line of sight with the member. Each and every accommodation gave the member an equal chance to perform at his or her best and experience the opportunity regardless of their situation.

Challenges

The greatest issue that we have faced since this process was implemented is the lack of understanding regarding "what" is covered by the ADA, and which *needs* may require accommodations. A member with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) does not automatically receive accommodations. For example, a member with low reading scores may have an IEP with a goal area to address the low scores. However, reading below level is not a disability as outlined by ADA – which is a more general piece of legislation than the IEP processes

at the school, district, or area association level. But again -- consider that "reading below grade level" *due to a medical condition is covered* in the ADA regulations. For the second example, with proper documentation, the member would receive some level of accommodations.

A different situation occurs when a member has had an accident or injury that places them in a *temporary state* of disability. Many times an FFA advisor has contacted FFA the day they are leaving for a convention or conference to tell staff about a student who has recently suffered a broken leg or other injury. In such situations, it is recommended that the ad-

visor *contact the Special Needs Specialist or program manager as soon as possible* to discuss the situation and determine how best to provide a quality experience for the member.

Open and Early Communication

In closing, the most important aspect of providing a positive experience for members who have special needs is open communication between FFA staff, state leadership, the advisor, parents or guardians, and the member. Along with early notification, once a member has decided to participate or has qualified for national competition, are vital to assist the member to have a high quality

experience and the best possible opportunity for success.



Jim Armbruster is a Senior Partner Services Specialist with the National FFA Organization. Jim taught agricultural education in Marana and Yuma Arizona, spending 19 years as a classroom teacher.

Making Agricultural Education (continued from page 8)

ential learning venues. Is a student ready to raise a market lamb or is a garden plot more suitable? Create a plan detailing reasonable expectations for managing the project and set benchmarks for skills and knowledge. Often, they will need more consistent supervision to stay focused and motivated. Ask them to detail their project's status in brief conversations before class. Make yourself available, when possible, to answer questions. Offer feedback verbally and in writing, sending a copy to the parents and the school psychologist.

9. FFA Participation

Within its motto, FFA advertises, "learning to do" and "doing to learn." FFA can assist learners with special needs by giving them a chance to interact with students in a variety of new situations beyond the classroom, thereby meeting the "independence" goal area of IEPs. Help students identify a career development event with a direct link to something the student has shown an interest in or demonstrated success at in the classroom.

Use more probing questions during discussion than with other students: Were they excited during the unit on small animal care? Perhaps they would like to join the specialty animals team. Did they do particularly well on the plant science test? Encourage them to join the horticulture team. Do they need to develop their skills as a leader? Help them run for chapter office or attend a state leadership conference. The possibilities are endless but extra coaching may be required.

Agriculture teachers are, like all teachers, hired to teach content and kids. In order to accomplish both, they must create an engaging, safe environment for students to learn. Agricultural education is poised to provide a quality experience for students with special needs, inside the classroom and beyond – one that is filled with acceptance in the moment, and hope for the future.

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Stop Treating Them So Special

by Chris Livengood and Deborah A. Boone

During my student teaching tenure at Jefferson High School (West Virginia), I had the distinct pleasure of working with special needs students who were in a separate Agriculture and Natural Resources I class. It is my sincere belief that with the right motivation and determination, every student can be successful in the agriculture classroom and labs. The first mistake to make in their education progress is to separate these individuals.

When I first arrived at Jefferson High School, I was assigned to work with both Mr. Greene's and Mr. Fincham's classes. Some classes I taught longer than others based on my educational needs, as well as those of the students. I taught two agricultural mechanics classes for most of the 12 week period because I wanted to learn and get comfortable with directing an agricultural mechanics program. I have never felt fully proficient in the mechanics shop and this time allowed me to learn myself and ask numerous questions of Mr. Green, my cooperating teacher. It was during one of these shop classes that I noticed the Agriculture and Natural Resources I special education class in the shop.

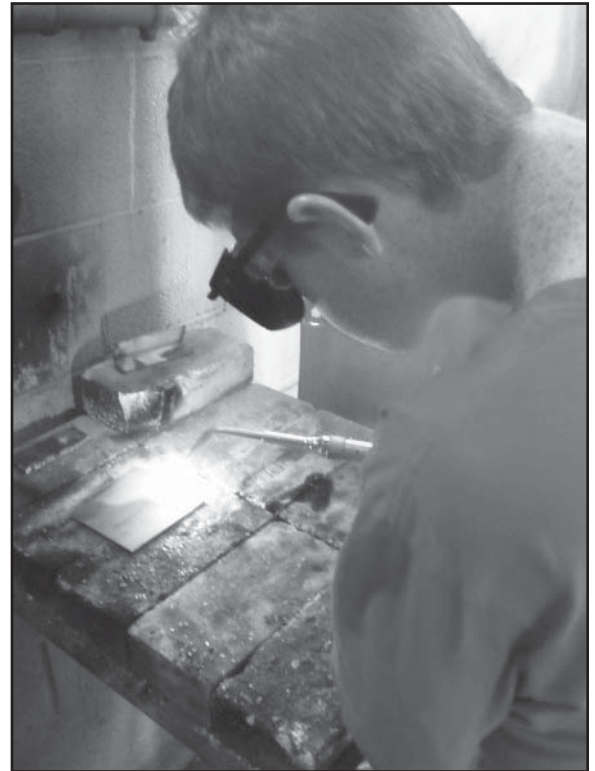
The Agriculture and Natural Resources I special education class was made up of 12 students. These students ranged from behavioral disorders to cognitively impaired to Autism. The latter two were both high functioning individuals which meant they were socially awkward or didn't process things at first. All were social with each other and later I would find out they all had a genuine need

to please the adults around them.

There were only three activities that I ever noticed the special education class do; they would clean up the various areas, paint tables & watch demonstrations. My attention of course was on my own class, but slowly I observed the same monotonous activities these students did day after day. I will concede one point, they never complained. They were glad to just be in the shop setting and around the equipment and have a paint brush in their hand. One day I noticed something. I would catch them looking over several times each day at my class and I could see the wonder in their eyes as to what was going on behind those welding booths. This went on for a couple weeks and I would see their instructors refocus their attention and the students would get back to work. Then it hit me. Would it be possible to teach them how to weld on an oxy-acetylene unit.

Several red flags went up at once. What about the open flame? What if they drop it and injure themselves? What if they drop it and injure someone else? What if the unit blows up? What if they blew up the school? Is this a bad idea? Are these kids smart enough to know that it's dangerous? After I asked myself that last question, I became angry at myself. How dare I think these kids weren't smart.

What is smart anyway? Is it getting all the questions right on a test? Is it passing high school or going to college? We all know what smart



is when we see it, yet we can never quite get the definition right. As educators, we know the different levels of learners and the skills some may be amazing at, others may fall short. For one reason or another, these students were placed as special.

I sat down during my planning period one day and spoke with Mr. Greene on how he felt if I were to teach the special education class alongside my Agricultural Mechanics I shop class. Subject matter wise, both sets of students had never welded before and both sets of students were anxious and a little nervous on welding. He did express a few concerns. He felt that the special education students should not turn on or off the oxy-acetylene equipment in the shop. He also added that they should be monitored closely and always paired with a student from the Agricultural Mechanics I class. I wanted to interject about the first part. Sim-

ple directions could have been easily posted and monitored to assist the special needs students turn on or off the equipment. Since it was only my 4th week teaching in the shop, I thought it best to listen to experience, grind my teeth and give in. The later condition was already one of my own ideas, but for different reasons.

I have had the pleasure of working with children with special needs from the past 6 years. I have worked with ages 5-20 and these children had the exact forms of needs which this class exhibited. I knew from my prior experiences and education that students in the general education setting who work with special needs students are a lot calmer and produce better results in their work because they are teaching their peers and want them to succeed as well. In education, this is referred to as inclusion. Inclusion can be a teacher's best friend. With the right scaffolding, or lesson set-up, both the students and teacher can have a meaningful educational experience. While I had never heard of inclusion being practiced in the Ag Mech shop, I knew that the principles would be the same and much could be achieved.

I spoke with Mr. Fincham who immediately said it was an amazing idea and was excited to see the outcome. With Mr. Fincham and the special education teacher's blessings, I made plans to do a few lessons that included both classes in the shop. I knew that it was going to be a great experiment and if I pulled it off, could actually have some significance to both the school programs as well as my future classroom. The main key is the prep work.

It truly doesn't take a lot of preparation to include special needs students in the Ag Mech shop, at least not from my point of view. It does however take meaningful preparation. The

first task was getting the agricultural education students on board. This was predictably easy. Agricultural education students are known as the school and community helpers. They spend countless hours working with their own projects, helping out at the fair grounds and assisting teachers with their agriculture based questions. Not only were they willing to assist and teach, but they were excited about the experience. There are several stipulations which must be understood by both sets of students.



General Education Students:

1. If you do not feel comfortable working with your partner, you don't have to
2. At any point you feel unsafe or see a problem or issue, no matter how small, immediately see the instructor
3. Always stay with your partner
4. Start out by welding several puddles and explaining what you're doing at the same time so your partner will better understand
5. Hold the torch first and let them place their hands on top of yours to understand the motion to create a puddle
6. Let them hold the torch and place your hand on top of theirs to get them comfortable with the feel of

the torch

7. Once you and your partner feel comfortable, allow them to hold the torch by themselves and make a puddle
8. Give them some good feedback. Tell them when they are doing something good; explain to them how to make it better.
9. Most importantly, this lesson is designed to be fun. You are meeting new people, you are showing off your skills and it's no race. Relax and if no one creates a puddle, the point is, you are both doing your best.
10. Take a moment and think of the difference you are actually making in someone's life today.

Special Education Students:

1. If you do not feel comfortable working with your partner, you don't have to
2. At any point you feel unsafe or see a problem or issue, no matter how small, immediately see the instructor

3. Always stay with your partner
4. Your partner will start out by welding several puddles and explain what they are doing at the same time so you will better understand
5. Your partner will hold the torch first and you will place your hands on top of theirs to understand the motion to do a puddle
6. You will then hold the torch and your partners hand is on top of yours to get comfortable with the feel of the torch

There were some who were excited and by the end of the period had created a few puddles and were smiling from ear to ear at what they had accomplished. One student said “This is the best thing I have ever done in school before.” There were several students that were scared at first. One in particular took special attention from me. At first this student wouldn’t go near the booth. It took several minutes to talk to him, open the booth, show his friends in the other booths, and explain that they were OK. When we finally got him into the booth, we lit the torch. Instantly

er puddle and he saw the movements of my hand and what I was doing and slowly but surely, we went through several puddles. I handed him over to his Agricultural Mechanics I partner and looked in on the other students. Everyone wanted to please everyone else and I noticed that groups of people started to form in the booths so that there might be two Agricultural Mechanics I students in with a special education student. All three were taking turns making puddles. All three were patient and giving each other advice and it seemed as if it might be scripted from a Hallmark movie. By the end of the period, the student who was scared in the beginning had actually created a puddle. EVERY student in that class had created a puddle.

Both groups produced great results and more than welding was learned in the shop.

7. Once you and your partner feel comfortable, hold the torch by yourself and make a puddle
8. Most importantly, this lesson is designed to be fun. You are meeting new people, you are showing off your skills and it’s no race. Relax and if no one creates a puddle, the point is, you are both doing your best.
9. Be on task and if I see goofing off or you are not focusing, we will switch to a different activity
10. Ask questions!

The biggest problem I had was there were only 12 special education students and not every general Agricultural Mechanics I student could help out. I was proud to be in education and I truly feel that it was that moment that opened my eyes to see what education was really about.

he backed up, but he didn’t leave the booth. We adjusted the flame and I asked him what the flame looked like and he told the colors. I asked him what the flame sounded like and he told me it sounded like the wind (a good oxy-flame should sound like a low summer breeze). I told him that as long as welding was done correctly, there was no need to be afraid and asked if he was afraid of wind. He replied “No” and then I said “well good,” because that is as scary as what the flame was right then.

The student watched through his welding helmet as I moved some puddle around and I explained to him what I was doing. I then told him to place his hand on mine. Notice, I did not ask him if he wanted to, I just told him to do it. I didn’t give him the option to rethink the situation. He was in a good mindset and I didn’t want him questioning himself. He easily put his hand on mine and I did another

There was one difference I made when it was cleanup time. I didn’t yell it like I normally do. I know from experience that students with special needs do not like to hear yelling. Many have been yelled at all their lives and it sets something off in them or scares them. So, I went to each individual booth and calmly told them that they had 5 minutes before clean up. Then I would tell them they had 2 minutes before cleanup and then 1 minute before cleanup and finally 30 seconds before cleanup and then I told them it was cleanup time. You may be wondering why I went through such a production? One aspect that special education students have trouble with is routine and transitions. When you can’t process a lot of information at once or your focus is lacking, it can be frustrating when your routine is upended all at once. In letting the students know several minutes and several times ahead of cleanup, they were able to get into the mindset of the expectations that were needed. I had the BEST cleanup ever!

At the end of that first lesson, they were efficient and wanted to help cleanup and everyone worked so well with each other. I even noticed some laughing and joking around and they became friends and would say hi in the hallways. This all happened in the very first lesson. In the other inclusion lessons I would teach, I had the same reactions. Everything went smoothly and both parties benefited. What I haven't discussed is how it benefited the general education students.

In my reasoning for these lessons I could have easily said that I wanted to value teamwork or inclusion or teaching methods. I could have gone on and on about how it made everyone better students. But mainly in the end, what outside people look at are results. Did the special education students learn to weld? YES. Did the general education students' welds benefit from these teaching methods? ABSOLUTELY! As I mentioned before, I knew that while they were teaching their partners, at the same time they were going to concentrate

harder and therefore produce a quality weld or puddle. In every instance, the students did better.

While I can't prove it was due to the fact that they were working with students with special needs and not just that they had more practice time; I can conclude that both parties produced great results and more than welding was learned in the shop during those lessons.

In conclusion, it was my privilege to work with ALL the students in the Jefferson High Agriculture Department and I was excited to take what I had learned in my own experiences and adapt it to the educational setting. I know that not everything is possible to everyone. I know that some skills and abilities are going to come more naturally to some. It is my sincere belief that there are numerous students in the special education setting that have an amazing aptitude that is just waiting to be explored. We as educators are doing a disservice to those who don't reach their full potential because of our own doubts and judgments. The worst insult you can

do to a student with special needs is treating them special. Let them be in the general education class as much as possible. You will find that both sets of students will thrive.



Chris Livengood graduated from West Virginia University in May 2012. He has accepted a teaching position at Timber Ridge School, Winchester, VA.



Dr. Deborah A. Boone is an Associate Professor in Agricultural and Extension Education at West Virginia University.

Growing Young Minds (continued from page 6)

how to use a measuring tape and saw, exercised strength of will over muscle fatigue, and successfully completed their expected task. The pile of freshly-cut pieces of wood offered visual proof of a task well completed. Later, individuals pointed out which pieces they had cut by identifying the handwriting that marked the measurements for that particular piece of wood. The students were able to establish a direct connection between their engagement (hard work) and a reward (accurately cut wood).

The 21st century will offer instructors a challenging group of students as technology grooms them to expect instant results in astonishing amounts with minimal effort. Challenges may be greater for students in personally distressing situations. However, it is possible to combat inattention and apathy in the classroom by presenting curriculum in a manner that makes active participation with the educational material impossible to resist. If an instructor can immerse the student in a way that enhances

the educational content, integrate the content into a valid applicable and immediate activity, and establish a tangible end-product, then a student's active personal investment in their own education will likely follow. At the end of the day, "learning by doing" was a successful agricultural education model that helped GROW to flourish. We believe that these same principles may be successfully applied to other settings throughout the community.

WANTED



Theme Ideas

*for the 2013 Edition of
The Agricultural Education Magazine*

Please send all ideas to:

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2054 Agricultural Sciences Building
P.O. Box 6108
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Email: harry.boone@mail.wvu.edu*

Deadline: July 27, 2012

