

Developing Leadership Competence: A Coherent Curriculum Framework for Youth in Agricultural Education

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Introduction

Agricultural education has an apparent interest in Leadership Development. For years leadership has been at the heart of agricultural education, mainly because of the intra-curricular nature of the FFA in the agricultural education program. The National FFA and several researchers have attested to the value of leadership development as well as the influence of the FFA on leadership (Wigenbach and Kahler, 1997; Brannon, Holley, and Key, 1989; Townsend and Carter, 1983; Ricketts, 1982).

While the FFA is an integral part of the agricultural education program, it is not the only part. Agricultural education consists of a triangulation of practices involving classroom/lab activities, the FFA, and Supervised Agricultural Experience. The FFA, though proven in its ability to produce leadership, is only one point of the triad of agricultural education. As leadership development becomes even more important in a transformational vs. transactional workforce, the goal of the researchers is to develop a coherent curriculum framework for leadership competence for the classroom/lab phase of comprehensive agricultural education.

Methodology

To develop the conceptual model for a coherent curriculum framework in leadership development, the researchers evaluated an array of materials that evaluated and described the construct of leadership. Studies like that of Stodgill (1974), Kouzes and Posner (1995), and Bowditch and Buono (1990) as well as numerous others discussed the value of leadership, but failed to carry their ideas to youth leadership.

The researchers, who place primary concern on leadership development within the boundaries of youth in agricultural education also assessed the differences, similarities, and needs of adolescents. Research by the likes of DesMaria, Yang, and Farzenhkia (2000), Sandmann and Vandenberg (1995), and Fertmen and VanLinden (1999), which refer to youth leadership helped to address some of the present concerns.

The primary connection of leadership development through agricultural education comes from the FFA. Studies by Ricketts (1982), Brannon, Holley, and Key (1989), Dormody and Seevers (1994), Balschweid and Talbert (2000), and Townsend and Carter (1983) attested to the role of the FFA in the development of leadership. Although the FFA is considered intra-curricular, it is still just on facet of a comprehensive program and the types of leadership that it teaches are not the complete definition of the leadership construct.

Results

Through evaluation of each of the differences, similarities, and needs of adolescents, five dimensions of leadership development were identified. The five dimensions of leadership development were identified as “leadership information, leadership attitude, communications skills, decision-making, and stress management.” Each of the dimensions was fitted with the three stages of leadership development, which were: awareness, interaction, and mastery. By addressing each stage in each dimension, the complete and cohesive nature of a leadership curriculum that utilizes another component of agricultural education is possible.

Plans

The conceptual model for the coherent curriculum framework has been presented in seminars, and the initial perceptions of professionals have been positive. The conceptual leadership model will also be used in the Leadership Development in Agricultural and Natural Resource Professions course and others within the department of Agricultural Education and Communications at the University of Florida. The ultimate goal of the research is to develop and implement a coherent curriculum for developing competence in leadership for youth in agricultural education. Eventual dissemination to the secondary education programs in the state could provide students with complete knowledge and functional use of leadership.

Costs/Resources Needed

Time represents the only costs associated with the conceptual model of the leadership development curriculum framework.

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