A Critique of Checking Our Pulse: A Diagnostic of FFA Member Ethics with an Emphasis on Participation in Questionable Practices and Ability to Adhere to Guidelines

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Do we practice what we teach? In the process of preparing our students to become exemplary Agricultural Science teachers, have we as teacher educators taken a tongue-in-cheek approach to discussions of ethical considerations in livestock shows, CDEs, and even state and national officer elections? Further, are those new teachers looking around at their mentor teachers to determine what it takes to have a long, successful career as an Agricultural Science teacher? Finally, are the messages those pre-service and beginning teachers receive regarding ethics convoluted? I applaud these researchers for shedding some light on these and other questions with this study.

The theoretical framework provides the reader a good basic understanding of current conditions and concerns regarding ethics, morals and values. The need for ethics education, and ethical education, should be evident to any person living in our world. I appreciated the distinctions made between values and ethics, and was glad to see the researchers focus on ethical considerations rather than values considerations. It seems an individual’s values may be based on his or her culture, religion or people group affiliation, whereas ethics should mostly be the same regardless of those designations.

The purpose and objectives helped to further delineate the problem. Everyone associated with FFA should be concerned with the perceptions of the overall ethical condition of FFA. The study design was referenced based on established procedures and the population was clearly designated. Data collection procedures were adequately explained and the researchers reported an excellent response rate. The instrument and the data analysis procedures were unambiguous, leading the reader to a clearer understanding of the findings.

The researchers organized the results in text and tabular format for the readers benefit. I appreciated the results based on each objective. An interesting side note came in Table 3 showing the overwhelming majority of student teachers and teacher educators came from communities under 10,000 population. Although not critical to this research, I wonder if this correlates with the secondary programs across the nation, and if not, what this says about our teacher preparation programs. I thought it also particularly interesting that individuals who participated in FFA were less likely to perceive strong ethical concerns for FFA competitive activities, however individuals who participated in greater numbers of extra-curricular activities were more likely to be concerned with the overall ethical condition of FFA. Although that finding leads to questions, I wonder what led the researchers to conclude “when youth maximize their participation in terms of quantity, this leads them in developing a skeptical perception of extra curricular activities in general.” Were activities other than FFA assessed?

The researchers offered strong implications for higher priority placed on ethics education at both the secondary and collegiate level. It is imperative for us, as teacher educators, to adequately prepare our pre-service teachers to deal with ethical issues and to prepare them to teach ethics to their students. Further, we must all also accept the challenge for getting the word out to the current teachers and the Ag Ed stakeholders in our respective states.