

Creative Opportunities within Secondary Agriculture Classrooms for Latinx Leadership
Development

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Introduction:

As of July 2016, the Hispanic population within the United States of America was greater than fifty-seven million individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This makes Hispanics the nation's largest minority ethnic group. As such, there is a need for agricultural education to find ways to recruit members of the Latinx community to join the profession (Jones & Larke, Jr., 2001). One of the most significant barriers for teachers to overcome is the perception that Latinx students have of agriculture, agricultural education, and the FFA (Barajas et al., 2020; Bowen, 1993; Bowen et al., 1997). Teachers also face barriers in finding ways to communicate career paths and opportunities within the agricultural industry to nontraditional audiences (Sutphin, & Newsom-Stewart, 1995). The researcher proposes a simple intervention that can be implemented in most agriculture classrooms to overcome these challenges. The intervention is finding Latinx students within high school agriculture classes who show potential for leadership and making them the teaching assistants (TA).

This idea came to the researcher when he was a school-based agriculture educator (SBAE) at Green Canyon High School in North Logan, Utah. The classes that the researcher taught were comprised of approximately 97% Caucasian students with 2% being Latinx and 1% consisting of refugee students varying in nationality and race. The researcher saw a negative performance trend with the Latinx students in his classroom resulting in most failing to meet the requirements to pass the course. In an effort to change the current observed behavior the researcher developed the TA intervention.

How it Works

As mentioned previously, one of the most prominent variables teachers need to overcome with students of the Latinx community is misperceptions. Students feel like agricultural education, and the FFA is an organization for others, not them (Barajas et al., 2020). The innovative intervention addresses this by selecting Latinx students who show leadership potential within a class and giving them a leadership role. Each day the teacher creates a responsibility chart for each TA, including taking roll at the beginning of class, random roll taking throughout the class, grading participation-based assignments, aiding in group creation, etc. TA's are responsible for all course content and assessments along with all responsibilities given by the teacher. Some flexibility should be afforded regarding assignments due to their roles and responsibilities within the classroom.

Additionally, teachers set strict requirements for the TA and consequences if those requirements are not met. This should be discussed and reviewed regularly throughout the semester via face-to-face conversations. This is done collaboratively with the TA. By giving the Latinx students a leadership role, they can become the face of your class. Working closely with these students allows for a more personal relationship to form with the student, leading to the teacher encouraging FFA participation.

Results to Date

After implementing this innovation, the researcher found that all of the selected six Latinx students TA's had invited friends to participate in the agriculture program the following year. In total, from personal invitations by their friends, the program saw 12 additional Latinx students within the first year in addition to the six TA's who took another agriculture class the following year. The program benefited from the intervention, but significant positive grade change occurred for several of the TA's. Bryan Carrillo a now graduated student relates his thoughts on his time as a TA, "My experience as a TA really helped me to focus a lot in school not even that, but also taught me quite a bit of things because at the beginning when I first started high school I really never tried I always took school as a joke. I never took it serious, but after I got the chance to be a TA it helped me a lot. If it weren't for the experience to give me the chance to TA in your classroom, I don't think I would've made it out of high school." Personal confidence of the TA's grew as they took roll each day, gave instructions, guided project-based labs among their student peers. Latinx TA's brought unique perspectives and cultural insight to the design of learning activities in the lab and lecture. A greater connection occurred between parents of TA's and the teacher, thus increasing stakeholder input for the program and classroom. Fellow Latinx students within each class saw their peers participate in FFA events and felt more comfortable participating, increasing their knowledge of potential careers within the industry.

Future Plans/ Advice to Others

The primary goal of the researcher was to implement a primary intervention to get a sense of the response from the Latinx community within the agriculture program. After positive responses from the Latinx TA's, the researcher wishes to conduct research to further investigate outcomes and impacts of this innovation to expand on initial findings. The researcher also plans to increase the selection criteria and include multiple ethnicities to see if there are similar results. Advice for others primarily lies in communication with the TA's concerning responsibilities.

Teachers need to have very clear expectations for each TA each day, so they do not feel irrelevant. In addition to communication teachers should be flexible and understanding when there are circumstances that arise due to the cultural heritage and familial expectations, which area part of the Latinx lived experience. Finally, the teacher should be patient with the TA recognizing the process training can take and some of the challenges multicultural collaboration can bring.

Costs/ Resources Needed

The highest cost to the educator is time. The teacher needs to create task lists each day for the TA. Time is required for training the TA, especially with attendance, expectation creation, and evaluation. Minor costs are associated with the task list materials such as paper, writing materials, and copies. The teachers and the student can share some of the costs. Additional resources could include meeting with English as a Second Language teachers to discuss potential candidates that show leadership potential.

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