



Using Near-Peer Groups to Build Leadership and Animal Science Knowledge and Skills

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Introduction

- “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38).
- This innovation’s need arose when James Madison High School (JMHS) was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Agriscience teachers at the Agriscience Magnet Program (AMP) planned for how to provide students with the experience of raising their livestock Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) projects on campus, with a limited number allowed on campus at a time.
- Campolo et al. (2013) described near-peer teaching (NPT) as an effective approach to teaching and learning where students separated by one or two years of experience teach each other.
- “[NPT] stimulates learning in a much less stressful environment and therefore becomes a more enjoyable educational experience” (Campolo et al., 2013, p. 6).
- Texas ranks first in the total number of livestock shows and youth participation in such.
- Students raising animals for exhibition at these livestock shows gain knowledge in selection, production, nutrition, and general animal husbandry.

Tiered-Livestock Feeder Program

Gives families the opportunity to understand the financial and time commitments associated with raising livestock for exhibition before likely making a larger financial investment.

Varsity

- JV feeders deemed proficient
- Buys show quality animals
- Competes in major livestock shows in the state

Junior Varsity

- First-year novice feeders
- Purchase commercial quality animals to gain experience in raising and exhibiting livestock
- Animals’ final exhibition is the annual AMP Livestock Expo



How it Works

- Due to the limited number of people allowed in the livestock center at one time, JV feeders were divided into eight groups with each led by one Varsity feeder.
- The eight Varsity feeders met with the JV feeders and their parents to collect contact information.
- As a group, each decided what time worked best to feed in the evenings to answer any questions and to practice showmanship skills.
- The Varsity feeders met with the center supervisor, an AMP SBAE teacher, weekly to reflect on their experience and to get guidance on what information should be relayed to the JV feeders in the upcoming week.

Response to Innovation

When asked about their perception of the NPT program after the show season ended, students affirmed their appreciation for the experience.

Varsity Feeders’ Responses



“The experience definitely put me out of my comfort zone, but helped me learn how to coach kids of various skill sets.”



“This experience not only gave our JV raisers a head start, but it also gave us senior raisers a great opportunity to step up and take on a leadership role and learn and grow. Overall, this program was a tremendous success.”

Junior Varsity Feeders’ Responses



“These groups really helped me, and this year I would say I feel pretty experienced even though I didn’t get the normal experience.”



“The varsity feeders helped me get the hang of things in the barn. This experience not only taught me how to raise a lamb, but it also showed me the importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.”

Resources Needed

- Experienced feeders who work well with others and knowledgeable about all facets of raising the different species, including feeding, exercising, exhibiting, as well as animal health and welfare.
- Telephone numbers and email addresses of the JV feeders and their parents
- An online scheduling software, i.e. Signup Genius, for no-contact scheduling
- No costs were incurred by the livestock center or the feeders for this program other than the usual expenses associated with the students purchasing, caring for, and exhibiting their animals.

Results/Implications

- Results supported Campolo et al. (2013) assertion on NPT, and Kolb’s (1984) views regarding experiential learning.
- Implications from this study could be expanded to SBAE teachers implementing near-peer groups in other areas of learning, including classroom and laboratory instruction, FFA, or in other SAE contexts such as school gardens and greenhouses.

