

**Bringing History to Life: Creation of Supplemental Curriculum to Illuminate NFA History
within School-Based Agricultural Education Programs**

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

With a mission to promote agricultural leadership, character, thrift, scholarship, cooperation, and citizenship in its members, the New Farmers of America (NFA) was founded in 1935 (Lilly, 2005). In a time of segregation, the NFA gave African American male students the opportunity to participate in vocational agriculture in public high schools (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). NFA members developed skills and received training in farming, farm mechanics, livestock husbandry, and innovations in farming technology (Lilly, 2005). For 30 years, the NFA was a thriving organization with a rich history of member accomplishment. When the NFA and FFA merged in 1965, the NFA consisted of 1,004 chapters in 12 states with over 50,000 members (National FFA, 2023). Consistent with most business mergers, NFA members were absorbed into the FFA, but the customs and traditions which gave the NFA its unique identity was not. Today, it is hard to find NFA traditions, history, and culture being taught in agriculture education classrooms throughout the country.

The National FFA Organization has developed a new strategic plan. With record FFA membership, the emphasis to reach diverse student populations and promote inclusive practices within the FFA organization and agricultural industry is imperative (National FFA, 2023). Some could argue that the focus of future diversity efforts should be on enrolling more minority students and increasing membership in the FFA where programs are currently being offered (Moore, 1994). This would appear to be the logical solution, but, in many school-based agricultural education (SBAE) classrooms, NFA history is simply glossed over. So, what can be done to highlight the rich, diverse history that helped shape the FFA and enhance the curriculum for all FFA members? This question is what led Mr. Tim Taylor, agricultural education instructor/FFA advisor at Okmulgee Public Schools to create an instructional video highlighting the 70-year anniversary of the Dunbar NFA Chapter, past NFA members, and minority FFA members who are currently active within the chapter. This innovative idea was witnessed by the author during a 15-week clinical teaching experience in the fall semester of 2022.

Methodology/How it Works

In addition to National FFA curriculum, the video is used as supplemental material to teach the history of the NFA and its cultural significance in communities across the nation. The video showcases an interview conducted by a current Okmulgee FFA member with two former Dunbar NFA members. During the interview, the former NFA members share about their experiences and reactions to the "merger" of NFA and FFA in 1965 and give advice for current African American FFA members. In preparation for filming, preserved primary historical source artifacts (McDowell, 2002) including meeting minutes, photographs, plaques, pins, receipts, and awards were reviewed. Once collected, the primary and secondary source artifacts were displayed for use as b-roll during the interview.

This video is shown to students in both 8th Grade Ag Exploration, and all Introduction to Agriscience classes taught at Okmulgee Public Schools. Students are posed with two critical

thinking questions prior to watching the video: 1) what does diversity and inclusion mean to them, and 2) how they can help others feel included as a member of Okmulgee FFA? After the video, students are asked to compose a one-page reflective essay answering these questions.

Results to Date

The video was filmed in July of 2021 and published to Facebook and YouTube that September. Since its initial posting, the video has been viewed over 3,000 times on Facebook, almost 600 times on YouTube, and has been shared on the National FFA website. Additionally, Okmulgee FFA was highlighted in an article published by National FFA in the *New Horizons* magazine and received a shoutout during the opening session of the 95th National FFA Convention and Expo. Students in both 8th Grade Ag Exploration and Introduction to Agriscience said that the video was a great addition to FFA history curriculum. Upon completion of their one-page reflective essay, students read from their papers what diversity and inclusion meant to them. One student said, “to me it [diversity and inclusion] means giving equal opportunities to all students no matter what you look like.” Students were then asked how they can help others feel at home as a member of Okmulgee FFA. One student said, “make sure that they know there is always a spot for their ideas at the table.” Another said, “as a chapter we can make sure that there is minority representation in leadership roles.” The video sparked so much interest in students that the Okmulgee FFA chapter officer team decided to include additional Dunbar NFA alumni activities to their Program of Activities (POA) for the 2021-2022 school year.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

As the video was being filmed, current Okmulgee FFA members were excited to see integral members of their community be highlighted for their significant role in NFA history. Plans for future projects include another video highlighting specific experiences offered to Dunbar NFA members and launching a campaign to find a Dunbar NFA jacket to put on display. It is recommended that FFA chapters do their own research on NFA history in their area. This will help students foster a deeper sense of connection to the information as it pertains to their own FFA chapter. If programs do not have the equipment to film, or funding to hire an outside media producer, there are a number of alternative projects which can be done to highlight FFA chapter’s NFA history. Projects may include scrapbooks, podcasts, archival displays, and timelines. It is important to note that a program does not need to have NFA history to complete these projects. Having students research, plan, and complete an NFA history project, of any sort, will help them gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for what the organization once was and the role it played in FFA history.

Costs/Resources Needed

Resources needed for the video project include a camera with the option to record, and video editing software. If outsourced, costs may vary from State-to-State. In Oklahoma, the average cost of hiring a multimedia producer is \$130/hour. If you choose to complete a different project to showcase your chapter’s NFA history, prices may vary, but each can be done for little to no-cost depending on available materials.

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