

Lesson 1

Introducing Diversity

Learning Objectives

As a result of this lesson, the learner will

1. Define diversity.
2. Explain the implications for and impacts of diversity on Agricultural Education.
3. Identify stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination.
4. Act to eliminate prejudices and discrimination in Agricultural Education

Tools and Equipment

Computer, Projector, Students laptops, Paper, Microsoft Word, and PowerPoint.

References

Gardenswartz, L., & Rowe, A. (2021). *Four layers of diversity*. <https://www.gardenswartzrowe.com/>

National FFA Organization. (2004). *BLAST-OFF training: Building relationships*. Indianapolis, IN: Author.

Talbert, B. A., Croom, B., LaRose, S. E., Vaughn, R., & Lee, J. S. (2022). *Foundations of agricultural education* (4th edition). Purdue University Press.

Interest Approach

Many students believe their characteristics, beliefs, and experiences are expected, and everything else is different or wrong. This exercise shows that we are all similar, and some are based on chosen categories. This lesson can be taught at the beginning of the school year and will help you get to know the students and they get to know each other.

- For this exercise, students can go to different parts of the room to divide into categories or stand at their chairs when their category is called.
- Have students tell their names and something about their characteristics. For example, on several siblings, a student might say, "I am Joe Smith, and I am the youngest. I have two older brothers."
- For some characteristics, you must have a category of "none" or "does not apply." Categories given can be modified to fit local situations.

We are going to do exercises to learn about each other. I will call out a characteristic and several categories for it. Please go to the section of the room where I point out when the category fits you. I'll then ask each person individually to introduce themselves and tell how that category describes them. I'll use myself as an example of the birthplace characteristic. My name is, and I was born in (city/state/country).

Suggested categories are given in parentheses.

1. Birthplace (in this county/city, in this state, another U.S. state, another country)
2. Birth order (only child, oldest, youngest, middle)
3. Favorite type of music (electric dance music/EDM, religious/spiritual, rap, hip hop, country, rock, jazz, classical, other as appropriate)
4. Favorite sport to play (can be divided into specific sports or broader categories such as individual or team, indoor or outdoor, etc.)
5. Handedness (left, right, ambidextrous)
6. Birth month (January-March, April-June, July-September, October-December)
7. Height (5' or less, 5'-6', 6' or more)
8. Favorite auto companies (Chevy/GMC/Cadillac, Dodge/Chrysler/Fiat, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Jeep, Kia, Nissan, Toyota, Volkswagen, others as applicable)
9. Other characteristics with categories can be added as applicable.

We just described ourselves by different characteristics. Some are ones you cannot change, such as birthplace or birth month, while others may change, such as your favorite auto company or favorite sport. Most of these, however, are not used to discriminate against individuals or groups of people. You may have noticed that we did

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not do the characteristics of gender, ethnicity/race, or social class. People often do discriminate based on these three characteristics.

Objective 1

Define diversity.

Diversity is the variety of differences within a category or classification (Talbert et al., 2014). An Agricultural Education classroom may be called diverse if the students come from various agricultural backgrounds. For example, some students may not have agricultural experience, while others may be from a crop or livestock production farm. Other students may have horticulture or landscaping Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE), while others may be interested in biotechnology, aquaculture, or mechanics.

Gender, ethnicity/race, and social class are other ways of saying that Agricultural Education is diverse or not diverse. Because almost all Agricultural Education programs are located within the public school system, laws require these programs to be open to all students regardless of their characteristics. Having ethnic/racial, gender, and social class diversity in the Agricultural Education program benefits all involved. Students become aware of the opportunities available to them in agriculture. Students from various backgrounds contribute significantly to the classroom instruction.

Diversity is valued for two significant reasons. First, all people are to be valued and treated with respect and dignity. Regardless of how a person looks, dresses, talks, or thinks, that person has worth and deserves to be treated as such. Second, people with different backgrounds, experiences, and ways of thinking contribute to the education of all. If everyone in class is the same, the group may think alike and not explore different ways of doing things. Diversity contributes to alternative ways of looking at issues and solving problems.

Diversity can be thought of as the way we as individuals differ. These differences are on four layers for each person (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2021). 1) We, which includes personality and character traits; 2) Internal dimensions such as ethnicity/race, gender, and age; 3) External dimensions, which are social factors and life experiences such as education level, income, religion, and geography; and 4) Organizational dimensions, which for secondary students are related to school and work. Specific to the FFA are office/title, duties, and member associations.

Outward appearances can be deceiving. Individuals with diverse internal dimensions may be very similar to those with diverse external dimensions. Five paradigms, or ways of looking at diversity, are positive in their approach.

Paradigm 1 is called The Golden Rule. Individuals following this approach treat everyone equally and emphasize how we are similar rather than focus on differences.

Paradigm 2 is Called Right the Wrongs. Individuals following this approach recognize that groups have been wrongly disadvantaged in the past and sometimes even now. These need to be changed, and rules must be established for equality and justice.

Paradigm 3 is called Value the Differences. Individuals following this approach work to value differences and have people use those differences to make the organization better.

Paradigm 4 is called Takatoka (Cherokee for “standing together”). Individuals following this approach value respect and dignity, work to eliminate injustices, celebrate differences, and cultivate common ground among people.

Paradigm 5 is called The Platinum Rule. This rule states that we are to “do unto others as they would like us to do unto them.” Individuals following this rule ask others for their preferences rather than making assumptions.

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An e-Moment from the LifeKnowledge curriculum could be used here to emphasize these five paradigms. Here is the URL: e-moments Archives | National FFA Organization: https://www.ffa.org/resource_tag/e-moments/ This book has more on e-Moments.

Reardon, M., & Derner, S. (2009). Strategies for excellent teaching: Maximize learning moments. Prufrock Press.

A Marcell Marceau Moment or Motion Moment may work well here.

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Objective 2

Explain the implications for and impacts of diversity on Agricultural Education.

School-based Agricultural Education began primarily for rural, production-oriented White males. In the southern states, a separate Agricultural Education system was set up for rural, production-oriented African American males. In 2020, the makeup of Agricultural Education classrooms is different. Almost 46% are female, 40% come from a town, suburb, or city, and one-fourth are people of color.

Before 1965, the New Farmers of America (NFA) was the student organization for African American Agricultural Education students in 18 southern and eastern states. At its peak, the NFA had 58,000 members.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, segregated United States society was becoming integrated. In 1965, the FFA absorbed the NFA, and the NFA ceased to exist. Much remains to be done regarding the progress of diversity in agricultural education. For example, in Agricultural Education, there are fewer African American teachers in 2020 than there were 55 years before.

Objective 3

Identify stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination.

It is helpful to understand how some fight against diversity. These negative ways of thinking and acting include stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination.

A stereotype is a picture in your mind representing an opinion, attitude, or judgment about an individual or group. That picture is based on generalizations and oversimplifications. Let's use vegetables as an example. Mary believes that all vegetables taste bitter. She has based this stereotype on her taste of spinach and generalized that taste to all vegetables.

Many of us stereotype people. We base what we believe about a whole group on an interaction with one individual from that group or media representations. We may also base our mental pictures and beliefs on outward appearances, including clothing, hairstyles, skin color, how someone speaks, or many other characteristics.

Prejudice comes from stereotypes but takes it one step further. It is a preconceived judgment or opinion; in other words, it is formed before getting complete information. Prejudice is an irrational negative attitude directed against an individual, group, ethnicity/race, or characteristics of those. Using the example of Mary and vegetables, she has a stereotype that all vegetables are bitter. This will become a prejudice if she begins to act on the stereotype. For example, at a restaurant, she may return her plate to the kitchen if a vegetable is on the plate. She may not attend an event, such as the FFA banquet, if she believes vegetables will be served.

People can be prejudiced against other people or groups. Prejudices arise from stereotypes depicted in the media, passed down from relatives and friends, or unanalyzed personal experiences. Prejudices are harmful in two ways.

First, attitudes of anger or even hate may be acted upon. This leads to discrimination, which is discussed next, and possibly violence. Second, prejudices may prevent us from developing friendships with people different than us.

Discrimination results from stereotypes and prejudices. There are many types of discrimination and ways that people discriminate. It is defined as unjust actions that harm an individual or group based on stereotypes and prejudices. Mary would be discriminating if she stopped allowing other students who eat vegetables to sit at her table.

Objective 4

Act to eliminate prejudices and discrimination in Agricultural Education.

Knowing about diversity and understanding why it is essential for Agricultural Education is good. However, acting in a way that promotes diversity and eliminates stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination is even better.

How does an Agricultural Education student do this? First, you must value diversity. Then, you need to practice skills that show respect for others and build relationships with those different than you. There are several attitudes or ways of thinking that promote valuing diversity. Many believe the only way to right the wrong of the past is to establish laws and policies that establish equality and justice. This requires working through legal and political channels. Examples within a school are non-discrimination statements and rules for equitable treatment. Another way of thinking is to value the differences that each group can contribute. Examples within a school are celebrations such as Black History Month and “Student of the Week” highlights. Another way is to treat everyone with dignity and respect, celebrate differences while working toward common ground, and work to rid society of injustices.

Students who promote diversity tend to exhibit seven skills that build relationships.

These are:

1. Awareness of their own cultural identity. The exercise at the beginning of this lesson will help you do this. You will want to include gender, ethnicity/race, social class, religion, family, and other characteristics contributing to your identity.
2. Awareness of their limitations. Promoters of diversity speak out against stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. Students may be in situations where they feel uncomfortable speaking out or acting and do not know what to do or say. In these situations, the student should acknowledge the limitations and learn from the experience to act or speak out the next time.
3. Respecting the cultural identity of others. Just as the student should know their own cultural identity, they should understand the identity of others and respect and value that.
4. Listening and learning from others. Students who promote diversity listen and observe before speaking or acting. They must also reflect on diverse experiences before they act.
5. Being non-judgmental. Students who promote diversity take what others say and do at face value rather than trying to interpret it through their cultural lenses. This skill also involves being flexible because any situation can have multiple outcomes.
6. Communicating well. This skill involves active listening, which is listening for content and meaning. The student should be sincere, honest, and open when speaking.
7. Consistency. Above all else, students who promote diversity must be consistent and treat everyone equally.

What are some examples of how agricultural education students can promote diversity? (Answers may include the following. Landscaping a senior citizen home; Sponsoring activities during Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month; reviewing the local FFA Program of Activities to ensure that members are not excluded from activities because of gender, religion, ethnicity/race, or income; and ensuring FFA activities are designed to include members from all backgrounds and external dimensions.)

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Conclusion of Lesson 1

Agricultural Education and students in Agricultural Education should promote diversity and work for equality and justice.

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