



JULY 2006

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At Work**

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JOHN DEERE



The LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education is made possible through the generous support of our Founding Partners, as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.



This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2002-45201-05130 as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

Introducing the new LifeKnowledge Newsletter

This is the second issue of LifeKnowledge AT WORK, a product created by the National FFA Organization to advance the integration of LifeKnowledge in local agricultural education classrooms across America. Designed with local teachers in mind, LifeKnowledge AT WORK is a free electronic newsletter featuring tips from teachers, education experts, leadership gurus and a host of other resources.

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LifeKnowledge Featured Articles

The LifeKnowledge Factor: Achieving 10,000 Quality Ag Ed Programs by 2015

Doug Loudenslager, COO of the National FFA Organization, provides insight on how LifeKnowledge will help agricultural education reach its goal of 10,000 quality programs by 2015.

[Click here to read article](#)

Five Ways to Incorporate LifeKnowledge into SAE

Nathan Torrance, agriculture teacher and FFA advisor from Woodward, Okla., talks about how you can seamlessly incorporate LK into SAE programs. [Click here to read article](#)

LK Brings Value to Pork Producers

Nicole Boettger, Director of Producer Services for the National Pork Board, talks about how the pork producers are using LifeKnowledge to further organizational objectives. [Click here to read article](#)

Featured Precept

Incorporating LK Precept: "Character"

Take a look at how the LifeKnowledge precept of "character" can be taught in your classroom, in FFA and in an SAE. From the awareness level to mastery level, here's applicable information about character.

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Best Practices – Integrating "Character" Into the Classroom

Agriculture educator Rebecca Carter of Virginia offers pointers on teaching the LK precept of character.

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Ask The Expert

Integrating LK into Your Core Curriculum

Agriculture teacher and FFA advisor Cory Epler of Arkansas City, Kan., discusses the value of integrating LK into the core agriculture curriculum and the relevance it brings to the classroom. [Click here to read article](#)

Hot Tips

Asking Questions the Right Way

Wondering why certain classroom activities didn't have the impact you expected? Check out how a few tweaks and adjustments to the everyday classroom method of direction-giving can totally change the outcomes in your classroom.

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LifeKnowledge News

What's New with LK

- LifeKnowledge 3.0 Debuts at the 79th National FFA Convention
- Share Your LifeKnowledge Success Stories
- Vlasin and White Join LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education

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Sponsor Recognition

John Deere: Life Partners Support LifeKnowledge

For more than 60 years, John Deere has been an enthusiastic supporter of the National FFA Organization. In fact, the company is the longest contributing supporter of FFA, and that support continues with the company's commitment as a Founding Partner of the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education. [Click here to read article](#)

The LifeKnowledge Factor: Achieving 10,000 Quality Ag Ed Programs by 2015

By Doug Loudenslager, Chief Operating Officer, National FFA Organization

Team Ag Ed has set a goal to raise the number of quality agricultural education programs from 7,200 to 10,000 by the year 2015, an increase of almost 40 percent. So what does this mean, and how do we get there? I like to refer to this number as a BHAG, or big, hairy, audacious goal, a term invented by Stanford professors Jim Collins and Jerry Porras. The idea behind establishing a BHAG is to create a common vision for an organization and then pursue that vision by aligning efforts, resources and goals. Our BHAG will enable all of us in the agricultural education family to carry out initiatives that significantly raise the bar on both the quality and quantity of our programs.

For starters, the National Council for Agricultural Education is in the process of identifying standards that define a quality agricultural education program with regard to classroom instruction, supervised agricultural experience (SAE) and FFA. We anticipate having these standards in place by the first quarter of 2007. They will provide a clearer picture of where our programs are and where we need them to go.

One initiative that holds great promise for increasing the quality of local programs is LifeKnowledge (LK). By now, most understand that LK is a research-based curriculum that teaches life skills focused on leadership, personal growth and career success. It includes more than 250 lesson plans, instructional materials for students and professional development for teachers. I can tell you that the implementation of LifeKnowledge already has us headed in the right direction toward achieving part of the BHAG. Here are several important reasons why:

1. LifeKnowledge strengthens each of the three components of an integrated agricultural education program. LK provides teachers with innovative teaching methods that can be applied in classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural experience and FFA activities. These creative methods and lesson plans engage students and help tailor instruction to meet a variety of learning styles and situations. Students reached through LK methods appear to respond more enthusiastically to the academic curriculum when it is brought to life in applications that are relevant and interesting. LK also provides opportunities to develop leadership and character skills in every student at a time when the idea of character education is taking hold.
2. LifeKnowledge helps raise the academic rigor, relevance and accountability of agricultural education. At a time when the nation's schools are struggling to increase student achievement, particularly in math and science, LK provides teachers with tools that help get this job done. Further, the educational debate around accountability, standards, rigor, relevance and relationships in schools is demanding solutions for student achievement that are proven and cost effective. The early results suggest that LK can help improve the ability of students to master the very concepts for which schools are being held increasingly accountable. Support of school administrators will logically flow to those programs that contribute to student success.
3. LifeKnowledge increases the effectiveness of teachers who are the heart of agricultural education. The key to helping grow and strengthen our programs is to retain existing teachers and replace those who retire with well-prepared new teachers. LK is a great tool for both veteran and novice teachers. Our data suggests as many as 89 percent of all teachers who have received LK training are using it on a regular basis and believe it's helping them be more effective. For most teachers, LK has become an aspect of instructional style by complementing current teaching strategies. For others, it has brought enthusiasm back into the classroom. We would like to see LK integrated into all college-level agriculture teacher education programs so that teacher educators can work with pre-service teachers to help them learn the concepts of LK in college, making the transition into the classroom easier. To support this goal, we will host a course this fall (similar to the Delta Conference) for 30 teacher educators from some of the nation's top undergraduate and graduate agricultural education programs.

"The key to helping grow and strengthen our programs is to retain existing teachers and replace those who retire with well-prepared new teachers. Our data suggests as many as 89 percent of all teachers who have received LK training are using it on a regular basis and believe it's helping them be more effective."

While opening 2,800 new agricultural education programs by 2015 is an ambitious goal, LK is leading us briskly down a path to increasing the quality of current and future programs. Because LK actualizes the teaching of leadership, personal growth and career success for every student, we will continue to nourish it and help more teachers discover how to integrate it into their teaching toolbox. Those teachers who have already embraced LifeKnowledge have given us a great start in working toward the BHAG. For others, the best is yet to come.

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Five Ways to Incorporate LifeKnowledge into SAE with Ease

By Nathan Torrance, Agriculture Educator/FFA Advisor, Woodward, Okla.



I have a student who in his first year in agriculture bought a show pig. This student did not have a lot of self-confidence and the pig was his entire SAE project for that year. Toward the end of the year when it was time to show the pig and reap the potential rewards, the animal got sick. Needless to say, things did not turn out well. My student wanted to write the whole thing off as one big failure.

What my student didn't realize at the time is that this failure would turn into his greatest asset. Applying LK principles, I was able to advise him on dealing with setbacks and things we don't plan for because, after all, that's life! Rather than focus on the negative, we evaluated the whole project from start to finish, including his ability to deal with this setback and how to apply it to future success. In only two years since the pig incident, this student owns a string of eight registered show heifers. He talks with breeders, goes to livestock shows, is involved with artificial insemination and embryo transplants, participates in livestock judging and learned how to take out loans to pay for his project, among other skills. The best part is, he loves it.

Obviously, the example above is a unique case and doesn't apply to all of my students. However, it is the perfect example of why integrating LK into SAE programs is so important. The reason we use LK in the classroom is to engage students and make learning more exciting, more fun and more relevant. Why not take what we use in class and apply it to the most hands-on portion of agricultural education—SAE? Here are five steps I have taken to seamlessly integrate LK into SAE. I think you'll find it's much easier than you think.

"Rather than focusing on the awards or end results, emphasize the importance of having a project and the lessons learned from start to finish."

1. Make everything intentional. When looking at LK, think of lessons and activities that apply to SAE. Character, hard work, responsibility, manners and developing leadership are just a few of the traits we can emphasize through SAE. Clipping a heifer is not just about learning the technical side of grooming a calf. It's about persistence when the animal doesn't cooperate, having the right tools to do the job, knowing the steps involved to make it look just right and being able to make adjustments if something goes wrong. Make points of conversation with your students so that the teaching moment sinks in.
2. Look at the big picture. Rather than focusing on the awards or end results, emphasize the importance of having a project and the lessons learned from start to finish. It's not necessarily about having the grand champion steer, although that's a bonus! It's about the work and the lessons learned from raising, feeding, grooming, planning, financing and showing that animal. Evaluate every student's SAE from the perspective of continuous improvement and character building. Every moment we have with our students is a teaching moment, from emphasizing the importance of treating others with respect to a neat appearance and good manners.
3. Use awards as a carrot, not as a method of measuring success. Sure, I like to win as much as the next ag advisor. But when it comes right down to it, we need to remember that trophies collect dust and character does not. Awards and recognition are great tools for us to motivate our students to do their best. And it's important for us to put incentives in front of them—it keeps us all energized to work toward goals. Be creative in helping your students select an SAE that will provide them with opportunities to grow and succeed on the awards stand and as a person. Stress that we can be successful while keeping everything in perspective. Use failures as building blocks for future success.
4. Leave little nuggets of information with your students. When a student leaves my program, I like to think that they have a lot of little nuggets from their FFA/ag ed experience that will help them the rest of their life. LK is all about little nuggets of useful information that we apply on a daily basis. By passing along a little nugget here and a little nugget there, they'll come away with something permanent and meaningful. That's why we become teachers.
5. Make the use of LK transparent. Students don't need to know you're using LK as part of your SAE strategy with them. If you're already using it in class, they've probably just come to expect it. Carry that over into SAE. Make LK concepts part of your thinking and perspective on handling daily situations. Students will learn by your example and will start thinking out of the box when it comes to priorities and experiences.

Always remember that SAE gives us the ideal opportunity as teachers to incorporate LK because what our students learn through SAE is real life. It's not like an FFA contest or a skill they learn in class. Integrating lessons on character enables students to move forward with a fulfilling experience, not just ribbons and awards.

Nathan is an LK trainer and writer. He has served as an LK integration team member, attended Delta I and has been selected for Delta II.

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LK Brings Value to Pork Producers

By Nicole Boettger, Director, Producer Services, National Pork Board

Every year, the producer leadership of the National Pork Board (NPB) identifies critical issues we need to work on as an organization. This year as a staff, we were charged with building future



leaders and developing partnerships within the agricultural industry. In order to address this lofty goal, we knew we needed to integrate a dynamic program that would take our existing leadership training and support of producers to the next level. When we heard about LifeKnowledge, we knew almost immediately that we had found a great fit. Not only did we like what the program could offer to two of our most important constituencies—our producer members and young people in agriculture—but we also liked the fact that it was coming from FFA, an organization known for leadership programs.

In the short time since becoming an LK founding partner, we couldn't be happier. We've already received training on using the content, and LK is well on its way to becoming an integral part of our leadership training and practices at the NPB. What has impressed us the most is the ease of use and customization of LK materials. We envision many uses for pieces found in both the LK and Collegiate LK curriculums. The lessons are written so that most folks can teach a lesson with very little prep time. We also like the fact that we can use science and proven models to measure an

impact in an area that is very subjective in nature.

We recently started using LK for our Pork Leadership Academy. This program, in its fourth year, is designed to keep our producers competitive in a changing world and economy. Each year, we train approximately 25 of our young leaders on a variety of topics including media training, speaking up for agriculture, understanding consumers and working with volunteers. We also work on the board's critical issues. We hold five sessions during the year and just completed our first session in June during the World Pork Expo. LK was very well received and provided a nice boost to our existing curriculum. We are eager to see where it takes us in the coming sessions.

In the coming months, we also plan to roll out LK to our member states and national committees. Our plan is to create short modules that could be used throughout the year in committee meetings. We will train staff members who don't have a background in education training to work with committee members on applying the LK materials. Based on the ease of using LK in the first session of our Pork Leadership Academy, we believe it will work very well to support all of our members on the state level and to improve the effectiveness of our committees.

We are certain you are as excited as we are to have access to such an amazing program. The next time you use an LK lesson with your students, remember that it's helping those of us in industry as well!

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"In the short time since becoming an LK founding partner, we couldn't be happier. We've already received training on using the content, and LK is well on its way to becoming an integral part of our leadership training and practices at the NPB."

Incorporating the LK Precept of "Character" into Student Development

By Doug Kueker, Education Specialist – Research, Development and Sponsored Programs Division

What it is...

A person's character seems to function in the same way as a cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building in ancient times was a perfectly squared stone set in the corner of the new building that was "plumbed," "squared" and "leveled" by the builder. Without a perfect starting point, it was recognized that the quality of the building would suffer through its construction and life span. So too is our leadership capacity built from the cornerstone of our own life—our character.

Character is a key to practicing premier leadership. In his book *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, John Maxwell notes that character is "formed over time" and is a "result of choices we make" rather than something we are naturally born with. In *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Sean Covey notes that character is much like a bank account. Our actions put credits and debits against our character. Follow through on a task as you say you will and "cha-ching," you've made a credit toward your character. Sit on a task or lay blame in the event of failure and "bzzzzz," you've made a debit on the ol' character account. Maxwell discusses character as the first of the 21 indispensable qualities by stating "leaders cannot rise above the limitations in their character." Actions that put credits toward our character build the foundation for strong leaders. Leaders who lead with the essence of character—integrity, discipline, respect, responsibility—are the people who will be the cornerstones of a strong agricultural industry.

The National FFA Organization associates six skills with character building:

- Live with integrity
- Accurately assess my values
- Accept responsibility for personal actions
- Respect others
- Practice self-discipline
- Value service to others

Noticing character building...

Students with an awareness of building character should be able to...

Identify people—past or present—who live with integrity.

Identify the benefits of living by their values.

Describe how the choices they make, which are based on their values, influence others.

Let's take a look at a sampling of the different behaviors you may notice with students as they work on developing mastery of the skills associated with building character.

Students with an awareness of building character should be able to...

- Identify people—past or present—who live with integrity.
- Identify the benefits of living by their values.
- Describe how the choices they make, which are based on their values, influence others.

Students who are interacting with character building should be able to...

- Create a growth plan to improve self-discipline.
- Faced with a moral dilemma, evaluate alternative actions and weigh outcomes of specific actions.
- Plan actions and goals to reflect personal values.

Students who are mastering skills in character building should be able to...

- Integrate personal values into daily living and task planning.
- Teach others about the value of integrity.
- Professionally accept credit or consequences for personal actions.

Incorporating Character Building into Your Program

FFA – Have a guest speaker from the community come in to discuss how character affects their role as a leader in the community. Have your chapter officers or a committee of FFA members responsible for debriefing the program and giving a short workshop on character building.

SAE – As part of the students' quarterly reports on their SAE program progress, have students identify a moral/ethical dilemma related to leadership that they recently faced in their enterprise. They should be able to tell you about the action they took and the results of that action. They should also tell you about their evaluation of the actions taken. Did they act with integrity? Why or why not?

Classroom – Have students write a short biography of a person who lived with character. Challenge them to identify the reasons why this person (famous or not) was considered a person with strong character. Hold a class discussion where students share what they learned about character from the assignment. Ask students questions to probe where they see everyday dilemmas with character in their lives.

Community – Have students interview a community business leader on the role of integrity in running their business. Following the interview, students write a newspaper article (that could be published) highlighting character in local businesses. Submit the article to the paper with information about the unit on character that students have been conducting in their agriculture classes.

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Best Practices – Integrating "Character" Into the Classroom

By Rebecca "Becky" Carter, Agriculture Teacher, Essex High School, Tappahannock, Virginia



As teachers, I think one of our primary responsibilities is to help our students realize their potential as students and as people. Integrating the LifeKnowledge precept of character into our daily teaching fits nicely with that goal. All too often, especially during high school years, students wear "masks" and we don't see the real person. Peer pressure, popularity contests and risky behavior lead too many young people down the wrong path. By integrating character into the classroom, we challenge students to take off those masks by nurturing self-confidence and self-worth. This creates an atmosphere for positive learning and presents a great opportunity for student development and growth. Integrating character is also simple to do since it is applicable to classroom, FFA and SAE activities. Following are a few things I do to integrate lessons on character, many times without the students even knowing it!

- **Use demonstrations.** I have students demonstrate a practice and then discuss how character is involved. For example, for business dining etiquette, I have two volunteers set the table correctly within a certain amount of time. Then we discuss what was done correctly and/or incorrectly and why it is important.
- **Role play.** Role play is great for making a specific point. For example, I've had my students portray how to meet and greet someone. One set of students did it the wrong way and another set did it correctly. Not only did they have fun acting this out, but they were able to see and experience the difference.
- **Mix it up!** Out of the blue, I will change the seating of the students and/or the placement of the desks in the classroom. This change throws them off and I tie it into character building or another LK precept.

"All too often, especially during high school years, students wear 'masks' and we don't see the real person. By integrating character into the classroom, we challenge students to take off those masks by nurturing self-confidence and self-worth."

- **Draw.** Drawing is a great way for students to share their thoughts on a subject. For character, I'll have them draw what they think it means on a poster. We then discuss the posters and hang them up in the hallway or classroom.
- **Use real-life examples.** It's important to apply character to real-life situations. My officers are an example. I often remind them that they are leaders and need to model good character for everyone else. When they don't, I call them on it. This year we had to make a major officer change due to some bad behavior choices. This also applies to CDEs where I emphasize demonstrating good character in competition, from the way they are dressed to their ethics to how they act toward others.
- **Apply it on a regular basis.** Make it part of your teaching routine. Always look for those "teachable moments." We had a student death this year and were able to take away some very good lessons from it that brought my students closer together.

Experience Results!

Making a deliberate effort to integrate character has produced noticeable results. My students pay more attention to what is going on in the classroom. There is an increased level of mutual respect that was not always there. My students enjoy being in class, knowing that it's a good, safe place—not a place to get away with something, but a welcoming place with structure and positive reinforcement. I've heard comments such as "We are like a family. The cliques are gone in here and we like to be here. You are like our mom." I take these comments as compliments, knowing that in agricultural education we have the opportunity to create an atmosphere that is beneficial to young people beyond academics. It's a place where learning occurs on many levels and where learning fundamentals such as character happens individually as well as in a group.

Those outside the agriculture classroom also notice a difference. Some of the teachers and one administrator have commented on the "goodness" of FFA members. They know that my students (for the most part) are well behaved, prepared and ready to tackle any situation. Because of this, we are the only high school group that helps run the elementary school field day at the end of the year. I have also been able to share LK concepts with other teachers. It is because of LK that I work more closely with teachers at my school as well as other schools in the county. Teachers appreciate using LK as a tool and the fact that with LK you don't have to change the way you teach—you just add to it and make it better.

Integrating the precept of character is a must. It is also rewarding when you know you've done your part in teaching good character in a society where character is often lacking.

Becky has been teaching agriculture in Virginia for eight years. She has used LK for two years and attended the Delta Conference in 2005.

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John Deere: Life Partners Support LifeKnowledge

For more than 60 years, John Deere has been an enthusiastic supporter of the National FFA Organization. In fact, the company is the longest contributing supporter of FFA, and that support continues with the company's commitment as a Founding Partner of the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education.

Doug DeVries, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Worldwide Agricultural Equipment Division, John Deere, knows firsthand how LifeKnowledge impacts agricultural education. As the National FFA Foundation's Sponsors' Board Chair, DeVries and other company leaders were immediately intrigued when they heard about LifeKnowledge.



Doug DeVries
Senior Vice President
Marketing,
Worldwide Agricultural
Equipment Division,
John Deere

"We saw real value in the curriculum because it enables FFA to foster leadership development across a large cross-section of young people while enabling us, as an industry, to support this logical addition of agricultural education to meet future workforce requirements," DeVries relates.

"LifeKnowledge curriculum connects educational and experiential learning while developing the leadership and team-oriented skills demanded by our global industry," DeVries adds.

Founded in 1837, John Deere & Company has grown from a one-man blacksmith shop into a corporation that today does business around the world and employs approximately 47,000 people. Headquartered in Moline, Ill., John Deere has been the world's top producer of ag equipment since 1963. The company's ability to compete on a global scale relies on employees who are able to apply knowledge in a wide range of areas, especially a team environment.

"We need people who can think, people who can lead and people who can work as part of a team," DeVries says.

"Clearly the young people who experience LifeKnowledge will be, as potential future employees, more skilled in the attributes important to business," DeVries explains. "No longer is the workplace about competing locally. It is now about competing globally. As we develop leadership and team-oriented skills in young people, we are creating the capability not only to succeed but to thrive in a global environment.

"Our need for employees with these leadership skills is significant for the future of the agricultural industry. Ultimately, our entire society will be better off with well-prepared and more capable young people," he concludes.

Since the beginning, John Deere's core values of quality, integrity, innovation and commitment have helped the company grow into what it is today. These values go hand-in-hand with the mission of FFA and support the need for LifeKnowledge curriculum.

For more information about John Deere, visit www.deere.com.

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Ask the Expert – Integrating LK into Your Core Curriculum

Q&A with Cory Epler, Agriculture Teacher, Arkansas City, Kansas

Q: What prompted you to integrate or cross-walk LK into your core content?

A: I have the Kansas Department of Education to thank for this one. Kansas does not have required curriculum standards for agricultural education. However, our state agricultural education leaders determined there was a need to add accountability and build competencies into our programs, especially in light of NCLB (No Child Left Behind) standards. They recognized the value of LK as a vehicle to reach all students, and mandated that in order for agricultural education to qualify for and receive public funding, LK must be integrated into all ag ed programs in our state. As part of this requirement, we fill out and submit competency profiles on every student enrolled in ag ed classes. This gives local and state administrators tangible evidence that supports the relevancy of agricultural education in public schools.



Cory Epler,
Agriculture Teacher,
Arkansas City, Kansas

Q: What was the integration process like and what steps did you take?

A: As with anything new, there was a lot of time invested up front, especially since we did not have integration tools such as LK 2.0 to facilitate the process. The ag teachers at our school sat down as a group and evaluated three primary questions. 1) What are the most important technical aspects of our curriculum? 2) What areas of our curriculum benefit students the most? 3) What are our objectives to help students as a class and individually? From there we evaluated the LK lessons and integrated them in a way that made our existing curriculum stronger and more relevant to the students. It's easy to just slap some good ideas on paper. But if you really want to reach all students, you'll gladly take the time to integrate LK in a manner that makes a noticeable difference in your classroom. My advice for teachers is to definitely take advantage of the integration tools from National FFA such as LK 2.0, and to always keep in mind what is best for the students.

Q: What type of documentation do you have to provide administrators? How do you find time to do this?

A: We provide annual course competency profiles to our local and state administrators

for each student enrolled in ag ed classes. This means if one student takes three different agriculture classes, we will have three separate profiles on file for that student for that year. This one-page document consists of a specific objective and specific outcome within each course, within each unit we teach. We are able to track if students attained certain competencies or if they did not. Not only is this beneficial to fulfill administrative requirements, but it helps us and the student to track their progress from unit to unit and year to year. It also helps identify areas that we can improve upon as teachers and within our curriculum. As for time, we have three teachers in our ag department for 260 students. Filling out the paperwork has become part of our routine, so time is really not an issue. Personally, it keeps me focused on helping each student on an individual basis. No one gets lost and everyone benefits.

"It's easy to just slap some good ideas on paper. But if you really want to reach all students, you'll gladly take the time needed to integrate LK in a manner that makes a noticeable difference in your classroom."

Q: How have administrators responded to the integration of LK?

A: We have a very supportive administration who believes the use of LK makes our department the premier place to learn about leadership and character while gaining knowledge in agriculture. Essentially, it has made agricultural education a star within both our local and state education communities. It also gives us tremendous leverage in justifying the value of agricultural education. Academic integration is essential not only for agricultural education programs, but for the agriculture industry. We are continually hearing from industry leaders that they can teach the technical aspects of the job, but characteristics such as honesty, leadership, accountability and trust are things we as ag teachers need to reinforce before students enter the workplace.

Q: How has the integration of LK benefited you as a teacher? Your students?

A. As a teacher, it has enabled me to focus on benefiting all students in class, not just the few I take to FFA leadership conferences. Even when we have students who don't want to join FFA, I have an opportunity to influence them. For my students, it has enabled them to take meaningful experiences away from class that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. As an example, I was having a difficult time getting students in my horticulture class to respect each other in the greenhouse. I integrated LK lessons on respect for others, comparing the greenhouse to a professional setting so that students would realize that in the greenhouse, just like the workplace, they need to respect each other and cooperate. When the unit was over, a boy in the class wrote about how learning respect made him realize some of his shortcomings and how he needed to make some changes. It's these little victories that have the most impact on you as a teacher and on the students themselves.

Q: What changes have you noticed in your program?

A. Since implementing LK, our program has had a paradigm shift from a mentality of doing things "we thought we HAD to do" to a mentality of "doing things because there is a need and we WANT to do it." Students are starting to recognize and embrace a service-oriented approach to life. For example, I took a group of nine students to Pass Christian, Miss., in April to help with the ongoing hurricane clean-up efforts. In three days, we did everything from picking up trash and cleaning up debris to repairing drywall. The students loved it and felt empowered by making a difference in this small community.

Q: What is your advice to teachers about the value of integrating LK?

A. The good news about the majority of teachers in our profession is that they really care about their students and will do what it takes to help them. As I discovered, you'll take the time to integrate LK if you want to help every student. Pace yourself and use the tools available to make it happen. Keep in mind that not only will you be helping your students and

yourself, but you'll be utilizing a valuable tool that supports the relevance and importance of your program to administrators and others who may question the value of agricultural education.

Cory has been teaching agriculture for five years. He has been involved in LK since the beginning, helping to write lessons and using LK principles in his classroom. He attended the first Delta Conference and will attend Delta II this summer.

If you have a question that you want to ask a LifeKnowledge expert, [you may submit it here](#). Answers will be found in future issues of the *LifeKnowledge AT WORK* newsletter. Please note that not every question may be answered.

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Asking the Questions the Right Way

By Andy Armbruster, Education Specialist – LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education

It's happened again...that uncomfortable silence. You're trying to process an activity or subject and there is no response from the students. You ask a question and the kids sit there. You don't understand why they won't respond. Anger and frustration enter your head. You're thinking you taught the content really well...maybe even the best ever. You might even feel a little vulnerable while standing there all by yourself at the front of the room in this "abyss of quietness." You're wondering if your students are even breathing. You just want to say, **"Answer the question!"** But did you ever ask yourself if you were asking the question the right way?

Compare the following questions: **Are there any questions? What questions are there?**

Both are questions that allow students to find clarity. Perhaps you might ask either of these two questions after you provide a set of instructions to students. Or maybe one of these questions is asked after explaining the expectations of being a chapter officer. The intent of both of these questions is the same—to help the students better understand something you explain to them; however, the answers can be extremely different.

The first of the two questions is what is known in the facilitation world as a **"Binary Question."** Consider a binary light switch used in electricity. It has two simple functions, on and off. In one position the lights are on, while in the other position the lights are off. There are only two possible options with this light switch. Unfortunately, as common as binary light switches are in our homes and places of work, so is binary questioning in the classroom.

You see, when asking a binary question such as **"Are there any questions?"** students have the option to provide only two answers: **Yes or No**. The conversation a binary question creates in a student's mind is either **"Yes, I have a question" or "No, I don't have a question."** Clearly, asking questions of students is important in the classroom, particularly when our students should be developing critical thinking skills. However, a binary question, with an answer of **Yes or No**, limits the amount of critical thinking that can take place and barely challenges our students' amazing brains.

One of the many goals of asking questions of our students is to actually **discover** what students are thinking and check for understanding. A binary question, again a question that only allows for a **Yes or No** answer, does very little to help us acquire insight into a student's learning process. When asking a higher order question such as **"What questions are there?"** the conversation in a student's head goes from **"No, I don't have a question"** to **"Hmm, I wonder what questions there are? Gosh, do I have questions? As a matter of fact, I do."** And lo and behold, instead of the 15 seconds in the "abyss of quietness," hands start going up.

Put yourself at the desk of one of your students. How would you respond if your teacher asked these questions?

Do you understand? or How can I make this clearer?

Are you finished? or Who needs more time?

Do you see what I mean? or Who has questions?

Do you understand? or What concepts make sense?

Okay, for a quick exercise on how it works, ask yourself the following questions in regard to this article and consider your answers.

Does this article make sense? and What makes sense about this article?

Do you understand what the article is saying? and How could it be clearer?

Can you change how you ask questions? and How will you change your style of questioning?

Try it. You'll be surprised at the type of response you get from your students. A good litmus test to check if you're asking a binary question is ask yourself if the question can be answered with a **Yes or No**. What is this article saying to you about your style of questioning?

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What's New with LK

LifeKnowledge 3.0 Launches at the 79th National FFA Convention.

You'll find innovative educational tools such as an online student leadership assessment and a leadership coaching guide for teachers. In addition, the new 3.0 version delivers the migration of all LifeKnowledge materials to the World Wide Web. Stop by the interactive classrooms at the FFA National Agricultural Career Show for a demonstration. Details focusing on the schedule of the 3.0 demonstration will be in the second edition of the Advisor's Planning Guide. For more information, contact Andy Armbruster at aarmbruster@ffa.org or call him at 317-802-4308.

We Want Your LifeKnowledge Stories of Success.

Do you have a success story for LifeKnowledge in your school? How are you using LifeKnowledge strategies to teach leadership to all students? What changes is LifeKnowledge making to your teaching style or the learning environment in your classroom? We'd like to know so we can share your success with other agricultural education teachers across the country. Contact Andy Armbruster at aarmbruster@ffa.org or call him at 317-802-4308.

Vlasin and White Join LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education.

Two experienced educators have joined the staff of the LifeKnowledge Center for Agricultural Education. Randy Vlasin and Christine White have both accepted positions as education specialists with the Center. Randy brings more than 22 years of teaching experience to the LifeKnowledge team. He most recently was an agricultural education teacher in Imperial, Neb. Christine has spent more than five years in the classroom and most recently worked as an agriculture educator, serving as the chairman of the career and technical education department at Hanover High School in Mechanicsville, Va. Randy and Christine both were part of the LifeKnowledge lesson plan writing teams and served as LifeKnowledge trainers.

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