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An Examination of Texas Agricultural Education Regarding Absence of Diverse Students

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**AN EXAMINATION OF TEXAS AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION REGARDING ABSENCE OF DIVERSE STUDENTS**

by

John David Denson, AAS, BS, M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Education

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
(May 2017)

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EDUCATION REGARDING ABSENCE OF DIVERSE STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate reasons for, and issues regarding, the lack of diversity in the department of agriculture and the Future Farmers of America (FFA). Data for this research were collected, studied, and analyzed. Data were examined to identify explanations for the lack of interest in agriculture among diverse students, and the lack of interest among school administrators and teachers to encourage studies in agriculture among the diverse. The analysis of data verified the existence of a real need for more disquiet in the differences of attitudes among diverse students regarding agriculture and agriculture programs, such as FFA. The findings from the study provided school administrators with conclusions related to the necessity for more concern for encouraging diverse students, as well as all students, to take a greater interest in agriculture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The people who I would like to thank for their role in my life of encouraging my love of agriculture and education is far too long to list here. My grandfathers, family, friends, students, teachers, and professors, although some are not still living, have all played a substantial part in making this what seemed to be impossible feat become a reality and a success. I would like to especially thank my dissertation committee members: Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, Dr. Karen Embry Jenlink, Dr. Pauline Sampson, and Dr. Dale Perritt, for their encouragement, advice, and patience. I would also like to thank my participants for taking the time to answer my questions and for opening my eyes to the issue.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family. It is because of their total support and confidence in me that I was able to obtain this achievement. I would like to thank my wife, Kristi Denson, my mother, Rosa Denson, and my children, Minnie and Maddie Denson for their love and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

Agriculture technology in America has developed tremendously in the past thirty years and is currently referred to as Agriculture Food and Natural Resources (AFNR). The interest in agriculture by the diverse population has increased, as well. However, during this time there has been a notable lack of interest in agriculture by non-white students in this development (J. E. Bowie, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

The Future Farmers of America (FFA) as defined by the Official FFA Manual is

... a dynamic youth organization within agricultural education that prepares students for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. FFA was created in 1928 as the Future Farmers of America; however, the name was changed to the National FFA Organization in 1988 to reflect the growing diversity of agriculture. Today, more than 610,000 student members are engaged in a wide range of agricultural education activities, leading to over 300 career opportunities in the agriculture science, food, fiber, and natural resources industry. Student success remains the primary mission of FFA. (National FFA, 2016b, pp. 8-9)

The FFA develops programs for student team work in agriculture from horticulture and farming, landscaping, and producing fruit to judging animals. In FFA, students show livestock they raise and train to become Grand Champions. FFA encourages students to learn methods in raising animals and producing meat or fabric and leather. The FFA also provides scholarships for agriculture students. The FFA is a national organization with over 610,000 members. Because of the dimensions of the National FFA, this study will only research information regarding the Texas State FFA chapters.

Martin and Kitchel (2015) reported that “FFA leaders have realized that the FFA organization does not represent the evolving demographics of America and have made efforts to cater to urban and diverse high school audiences with some success” (p.122). Martin and Kitchel (2015) further reported research that showed the National FFA Organization provides many activities in the field of agriculture typically found in rural areas, such as livestock and grain production; whereas some curriculum components such as veterinary science or research activities better fit urban areas. Martin and Kitchel (2015) stated “. . . the National FFA Organization, as an educational system, needs to be examined through a critical theory lens to explore the ideology of FFA and ensure that all FFA members can benefit from participation in the organization” (p. 125).

Martin and Kitchel (2015) observed, at the 2014 National FFA Convention, the effect diverse students attending the convention had from their experience. These students, according to Martin and Kitchel (2015), were generally accustomed to a culturally different atmosphere, but were surprised to find such a difference from what they were accustomed to. These students, according to Martin and Kitchel (2015) witnessed an overwhelmingly white population in a “. . . sea of black pants/skirts and

corduroy blue jackets with white faces emerging from almost every jacket, and how jackets with faces of color truly stuck out from the crowd” (p. 127).

Bowen (1994) noted “ . . . few teachers of any race now steer minority students into agriculture classes and college preparatory courses” (p. 7). According to research reports, the progress of agricultural education has the least success with ethnic diversity (Bowen, 1994; Martin & Kitchel, 2015). Texas A&M University is one of the few universities making any difference in the diverse student in the field of agriculture (Bowen, 1994). Research concerning the field of agriculture showed the program at Texas A&M “ . . . is producing more high caliber minority students for the food and agricultural sciences, and nationally, the Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) organization is increasing the number of minorities in the food and agricultural sciences” (Bowen, 1994, p. 8). Other schools and universities, as well, have made such changes since this report was made in 1994 (Jones et al., 1998a).

Talbert, Larke Jr., and Jones (1999) stated, “. . . agriculture has had a significant number of minorities performing manual labor from the time of slavery. This has left a legacy of minority youth perceiving agriculture as occupations involving manual labor with low pay and low prestige” (p. 90). According to Wilson (2015), “The education of African-American children during the late period of slavery, after 1800, was sporadic and unreliable in Texas as in other Southern states” (p. 1). Pay scale is of great importance and administration, teachers, and parents need to have this discussion with students during their middle and intermediate school years in an effort to encourage students to enroll in agriculture classes, and give the agricultural classes an honest effort. According to LaVergne et al. (2011), the lack of information about agricultural education has an

impact on African-American students' perceptions of agricultural education. This research determined agricultural educators need to revisit their recruitment efforts and develop strategies to provide a more positive perception of agricultural education (LaVergne et al., 2011). LaVergne et al. (2011) posited that recruitment efforts need to have synchronization among school guidance counselors, principals, and other teachers to ensure AFNR courses are being promoted and offered to all students. If the younger generation is not taught the need for agriculture and does not have the ability to pass lessons learned in agriculture down from one generation to the next, soon no one will have the understanding and knowledge to care for animals, of farming crops, nor to preserve food or provide clothing (Jones & Larke Jr., 2003). LaVergne et al. (2011) stated

By demonstrating evidence of a collaborative, trusting, and respectful relationship with potential role models from underrepresented groups, Texas agricultural teachers may persuade students of color and students with disabilities to become engaged in secondary agricultural education programs. (p. 148)

All students regardless of race or gender need to understand the necessity to learn everything possible in all areas of agriculture (Jones & Larke Jr., 2003). Students need encouragement to develop a desire regarding the need for education in the field of agriculture. Students need to see a positive attitude from school administration, school teachers, and parents in the field of agricultural technology if there is to be an increase of students in the agriculture field (Jones & Larke Jr., 2003). According to Bowen (1994), an apparent lack of trust in some diverse students is shown toward many adults, especially teachers; therefore, teachers should strive for the trust of students.

Furthermore, parents, administration, community, and teachers need to exhibit a positive attitude with diverse students and demonstrate a positive attitude in an effort to emphasize the need for agriculture knowledge.

Discussing Essentials for More Involvement in Agriculture

An east Texas high school with a predominately African American population has very few African Americans who, at this time, have any visible desire to take an interest in agriculture, or a part of the school's FFA chapter (J. E. Bowie, personal communication, March 17, 2014). However, with the addition of the largest Meat Laboratory in the eastern part of Texas, a much larger interest from the African American students, as well as other students, has developed at this east Texas high school. This increase in interest at this high school is demonstrated by an African American student who worked hard, even bringing up grades in other subjects as well, and became president of that FFA chapter. In the spring of 2015, he majored in agriculture in college with intentions of becoming an agriculture educator (D. Dudley, personal communication, June 12, 2015).

Trying to understand the innermost parts of an individual are not necessary. However, more important is to simply provide a positive attitude to students concerning the need for instruction in the field of agriculture. Rumberger emphasized, (as cited in Jones et al., 1998b), the increase of women and diversity from 1980 to 1997. Rumberger (Jones et al., 1998a) also reported comparable development with the high school teachers and enrollments in most of our universities.

Using the FFA membership as a gauge, the organization has attained a varied growth. In 2001, Hispanics accounted for 17% of the FFA membership and 4% of FFA

members were African American (National FFA, 2001). This was a nationwide measure. Using the FFA statistics as a gauge 15 years later, in 2016, the composition was 41% white, 13% Hispanic, 3% African-American, 1% American Indian, 1% Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1% two or more races (National FFA, 2016a). After 15 years, there has been no apparent change in the percentage of African American students in agriculture or agriculture programs. The operating headquarters for the New Farmers of America (NFA) in Texas was at Prairie View A&M University (an 1890 land grant university) (Wilson, 2015). Taking into consideration the report of a membership of 52,000 African Americans in the NFA in 1965 at the time of the NFA-FFA merger makes one question the cause for the decrease in the membership of African Americans in 2001 (National FFA, 2001).

History is often a guide to suggest what might have led to the decrease the African American population of students and members in the FFA organization; and statistics show in 2002 FFA membership is one-third female and three-fourths non-farmers, while less than 5% were African American (National FFA Organization, 2002). One reason for this decline, according to Jones et al. (1998a), as well as Wakefield and Talbert (2003) and Bowen (1994), is found in the decline of African American secondary teachers and strong community leaders as segregation ended in the late 1960s. As “. . . these teachers vanished, their leadership roles were not sustained by the agriculture teachers who replaced them” (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003, p. 96). The decline of African American teachers serving as role models also produced a decline in the presence of African American students in the field of agriculture (Jones et al., 1998a; LaVergne et al., 2011; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). The larger issue with the decline in the enrollment of

African American students in agriculture classes was originally, according to Wakefield and Talbert (2003), due to the lack of African American leadership and role models. This suggests a hidden concern for the necessity of more African American educators in the field of agriculture.

Males taught by teachers who had positive attitudes, and students who perceived the future value of the courses offered to them, tended to enroll in agricultural classes (Jones et al., 1998a; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). Jones et al. (1998b) reported schools having high technology science-based curricula also had higher enrollments than schools with a traditional production focus. Students need more hands-on instruction in the field of agriculture. Jones, Bowen, and Rumberger (1998) reported another example found through the FFA's creation of the H. O. Sargent Award honoring individuals for diversity activities. Bowen (1994) expressed his feeling regarding the action of African American agriculture educators creating the Population Diversity work group demonstrating a profession appreciating diversity. Bowen (1994), in reporting these items that demonstrated appreciation, felt it did not essentially indicate positive performances. Simply having an award is a nice gesture, but it does not guarantee the results needed.

High schools were developed in other states for the Agricultural Sciences, such as the W.B. Saul High School in Philadelphia and the Chicago High School (Bowen, 1994). Texas has also developed more agriculture departments in the larger inner city schools. From the 1980s, Texas has made large steps in the development of agriculture courses and agriculture programs, such as the FFA (Bowen, 1994; Harris, 2015). Universities are working with high schools in an effort to prepare students for a career in agricultural education and encourage a greater interest in agriculture. Research demonstrates the

need for more high schools to work with more universities toward preparing students for a career in agricultural education. There are numerous universities offering agricultural science and technology classes in all areas of Texas. This expresses the importance of understanding the current status of agriculture education in all areas of Texas.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the low representation of African American students in AFNR courses, and agricultural programs such as the FFA. The state of Texas has a definite decline in the African American population in the field of agricultural technology. An awareness of the need for more African Americans in agriculture ostensibly goes unnoticed (Harris, 2015; Jones et al., 1998; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). However, African American educators on all levels of education are declining, as well (Jones et al., 1998; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). The 50th anniversary of the merger of the NFA and FFA took place in 2015. Wakefield and Talbert (2003) reported that the history and accomplishments of the NFA prior to the merger, and how the history was being lost, and not passed on to students in the FFA. These were trying times during the merger for both the NFA and FFA students. Male African Americans in integrated schools were active members of the FFA (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003), and according to Wakefield and Talbert (2003), “Students who come today through the FFA, unless they get a person who would tell them about the NFA, probably would not know about them” (p. 102). “It was not until after Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting segregation in public schools that all African American students of vocational agriculture could become members of the FFA” (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003, p. 96). The African American student needs more parents, teachers, administrators, and

community leaders who provide a positive attitude regarding the field of agriculture, thus expressing the need for more African Americans in the field of agriculture (Harris, 2015; Jones et al., 1998; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

The origin of some enrollment problems of African American students in agriculture classes is due to the lack of African American leadership and role models (Harris, 2015; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). This suggests the need for more African American educators in the field of agriculture. Also, students having educators with positive attitudes developed a greater interest in the future value of the agricultural classes offered (Harris, 2015; Jones et al., 1998; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). Agriculture is a subject capable of giving a student a deep feeling of accomplishment as stated by various students enrolled in agriculture classes. There are opportunities for great endeavors in the field of agriculture; many possibilities and ways exist for a student's success and a feeling of incredible accomplishment (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

Wakefield and Talbert (2003) reported from their research that a memo was sent to all American Association of Agricultural Educators (AAAE) members, and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) members requesting information regarding past NFA members. Nine members selected were past NFA members, and each one was interviewed in person. These nine selected were NFA national officers, key state NFA officials, and NFA advisors.

One question asked of these nine selected members was: "What roles did the NFA play in the school/community where you resided or worked?" Some responses were that it served as a motivating force and helped students become school and

community leaders. Also, the NFA helped young men to grow, to understand themselves and their community, to set goals, and to learn leadership skills.

Another interesting question asked in this interview was: “What did you see as the primary differences between the NFA and FFA?” Some differences seen include limited FFA participation of African American students in youth activities and almost no chance for leadership roles in the FFA. Morale was higher in the NFA because many NFA members felt the FFA had absorbed the NFA rather than merge together.

Another question asked in Wakefield and Talbert’s (2003) interview was: “What strategies were used to get NFA students involved in the FFA?” Some responses to this question were “What strategies?” The attitude of the teachers to talk with students and encourage them to join the FFA was not the same as the NFA. Teachers said we’ll just say FFA. It was the attitude of the teacher of agriculture.

One other interesting question in this interview pertained to things lost in the merger of the NFA and the FFA. “What things were lost in the merger that may have been significant enough to retain that could help benefit minority involvement in the FFA today?” (p. 102). One of the interesting answers to this question was that contact with black leadership was lost. Many positions were phased out and no longer had that Black leadership push for our young people.

The Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to identify factors related to low participation among African American students in selecting AFNR courses in high school, participating in the FFA, and choosing agriculture as a profession. The purpose was to also identify what agriculture educators perceive as ways to increase the interest of

African American students in AFNR courses, FFA, and agriculture as a profession. It was the intent of the research study to present evidence-based conclusions that provide agriculture educators with strategies for increasing the interest and participation of African American students in AFNR courses and FFA programs. It was also the intent of this study to discern the basis for the low ratio of African American agricultural educators and to demonstrate the need for more African American agricultural educators. The research questions guiding this study included:

1. How are African American students being placed in AFNR courses?
2. How do African American students in middle and intermediate schools receive information needed regarding agriculture, allowing these students to have a better understanding of the possibilities available for a career in the field of agriculture?
3. How are African American high school students made aware of the opportunities in agriculture, such as: marketing, merchandising, meat and produce judging, meat production, fruit production, and many other opportunities existing in the field of agriculture?
4. How can agriculture educators increase the interest of African American students in AFNR courses, FFA, and agriculture as a profession?

Research by Jones, Bowen, Rumberger, and Family Chair of Agriculture (1998) finds students who are enrolling in agricultural classes have negative attitudes toward agriculture science, as well as biological science. There is lack of interest in either of the sciences according to reports (Jones et al., 1998), and African American students are more negative toward the agricultural sciences (Jones et al., 1998). Understanding the

need to turn attitudes around, and demonstrate the need for agricultural education is necessary (Jones et al., 1998).

Another finding in the research (Jones et al., 1998; Vincent, Kirby, Deeds, & Faulkner, 2014; Vincent & Kirby, 2015; Vincent & Torres, 2015) noted the possibility of agriculture educators having a lack of positive attitudes toward the actual performance of teaching the class. As Westbrook and Alston (2007) stated, “In order for all students to be successful, their individual needs must be met” (p. 125). There is a need for agriculture educators to realize that a lack of positive attitude can negatively affect a student’s interest. Westbrook and Alston (2007) stated “Given the low enrollment of African Americans studying agricultural science, the purpose of this study was to examine the strategies employed in recruiting and retaining African Americans in agricultural science” (p. 125).

Examining the motivational needs of the middle school 7th and 8th grade students enrolling in agricultural education, according to Rohs and Anderson (2001), could assist in preparing students for high school agricultural education; and, Rohs and Anderson (2001) reported finding in their research that the African-American students need higher achievement and power than students of any other ethnic categories.

Recommendations from Rohs and Anderson’s (2001) research reported the need for agricultural educators to provide educational experiences to meet the achievement and power needs of African American students, and provide African American students leadership opportunities and educational experiences empowering and inspiring them. Parents need to have a positive attitude regarding agriculture to encourage their children in agriculture participation (Jones et al., 1998a). We need to show the African American

parents, as well as all students who might have an interest in agriculture, the need in Texas for a larger agriculture population among the African American and to realize the benefits of an agriculture education.

Significance of Study

According to LaVergne et al. (2011), African-American students need more awareness of the need for agricultural education. As reported, the lack of information about agricultural education has an impact on African-American students' perceptions of agricultural education (LaVergne et al., 2011). The field of agriculture is not reaching the diverse students' understanding for the necessity of this education and training (Jaygresh, 2012). Many real life experiences demonstrate the need for more education in agriculture, such as what a rump roast is, or a New York steak, or the difference in a jalapeno pepper and a cayenne pepper, or a bell pepper. These are only simple examples of things a student is capable of learning and understanding through education in agriculture, and there is so much more to learn through AFNR classes. Having agriculture education and training is helpful in every areas of livelihood (Jaygresh, 2012). Without agriculture education people will find themselves without clothing and without food. People without agricultural knowledge will end up at the mercy of people who do have this knowledge and training.

Research by Whent (1994) found a definite lack of representation by minorities in the agriculture field. She stated “. . . anyone can observe the disparity at any agricultural education meeting, at any level of the profession” (p. 9). According to Croom and Alston (2009), the need to provide a contextual basis to understand why African Americans have not become engaged in career and technical education and to examine historical events

associated with the establishment of career and technical education for African Americans in the United States is very important. However, Vincent and Kirby (2015) state the need to remember each student is an individual with individual needs; and the cultural background and its effect on learning within each student may not be a factor.

Definitions

Several key terms were used throughout this study. To provide a better understanding of their meanings in relation to the focus of the study, the following conceptual definitions were identified.

Agriculture education.

Agriculture education is the systematic instruction in agriculture and natural resources at the elementary, middle school, secondary, postsecondary, or adult levels for the purpose of (1) preparing people for entry or advancement in agricultural occupations and professions, (2) job creation and entrepreneurship, and (3) agricultural literacy (Talbert & Larke Jr., 1995).

Diversity.

Diversity is the variety of differences within a category or classification; most often refers to differences of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, though other forms of diversity, including geography, religious belief, and language, need to be considered (Croom & Alston, 2009; LaVergne et al., 2011; Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

Embedded biases.

Embedded biases are usually unconscious prejudices expressed when educators have preconceived ideas about a specific race or gender that limits the acceptance or

access of that group into professional programs or careers. People with embedded biases can subtly or blatantly treat some people as less than equal (Whent, 1994).

Ethnics.

Ethics are a connectedness based on commonalities in which specific aspects of cultural patterns shared and transmission over time creates a common history and ancestry (Jones & Larke Jr., 2003).

Individual.

Someone who is overcoming biased cultural conditioning and conquering the inertia and feeling of powerlessness on a personal level. People are capable of change if they are willing to confront and unlearn their biased conditioning (Vincent, 2011).

Knowledge.

Knowledge is having a good understanding of the sociopolitical system's operation in the United States with respect to its treatment of minorities; a clear and explicit understanding of the generic characteristics of counseling and therapy; understanding of institutional barriers; possesses information about a group in association with (Vincent, 2011).

Minority.

Minority is an individual, organization, or society that is not representative of the most populous culture (Talbert & Larke Jr., 1995).

Race.

Race is phenotypic appearances, such as skin color, hair type, skin hue, eye color, statue, body size, nose, eyes, and head shape (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Racial color-blindness.

Racial color-blindness is an attitude that the race and ethnicity of an individual should not and does not matter in any situation (Bowen, 1994).

Assumptions

The researcher, as an agriculture educator, has experienced issues regarding African American students in agriculture. There are several assumptions regarding the research study. First, there is an assumption that the lack of African American interest in the field of agricultural technology has been an on-going subject for decades, as denoted in the literature, which may or may not clearly represent the current status of African American students' interest in agriculture technology in general and FFA in particular.

With the suggestion that African American students and other diverse students seldom check on the race of a teacher before enrolling in a class, there is an assumption that participants in the study may have assumed the race of the teacher has very little to do with whether or not students enroll in AFNR courses. Therefore, it is also assumed that the quality of the school and AFNR facilities also has very little to do with whether or not students enroll in agriculture courses.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I presented a discussion of the background of the problem regarding African Americans' lack of interest in agriculture and deliberated on the issue. The problem statement as well as purpose statement and research questions were presented and discussed. A select set of conceptual terms and definitions germane to the study were provided. The significance of the research study was also discussed.

The researcher presents, in Chapter II, an analysis of literature and research findings concerned with the lack of interest in African American students in the field of agriculture. Previous researchers in many occasions were also African American agriculture educators with a concern for this issue. The researcher provides a systematic synthesis of relevant literature from recognized researchers and authorities indicating attitude problems, role model concerns, race issues, and counseling.

Chapter III presents the researcher's discussion of the research design selected for this study. A discussion of qualitative method case study is presented as well as a discussion of the methods for participant selection, and data collection and analysis. As discussed, a number of case studies will be developed from interviews with African American agriculture educators who also have concerns for the lack of African American students in the field of agriculture and the FFA programs. As focus is given to these cases, and studies of each participant interviewed and perceptions determined, reports will be written on these case studies for the qualitative case study. The chapter concludes with how the findings will be reported.

Chapters IV, V, and VI present the individual case studies. Interviews were conducted with three African American agriculture educators, two male and one female. The researcher asked questions regarding each educator's childhood, college experiences, feelings about racism, personal experiences with students, and possible solutions. Initial interviews were conducted face-to-face with each interviewee. Follow-up interviews were conducted through voice calls, email, and meeting at FFA contests. Each interviewee was candid with his and her answers and showed appreciation for my concern with this issue.

Chapter VII presents a cross-case analysis between all three agriculture educators interviewed. The researcher summarized each interview and found similarities and differences between the three educators. Chapter VII also presents tables representing each high school's student population changes, as well as each school's FFA enrollment between the school years 2009 – 2010 and 2014 – 2015. Tables are also included comparing the three schools' student populations and FFA enrollments during the school year 2014 – 2015.

Chapter VIII presents the researcher's summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations regarding the lack of participation of African Americans in AFNR courses, FFA, and agriculture professions. The researcher ends this chapter with his final reflections regarding this study and the future of agriculture education.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, an analysis of research and findings concerning the lack of an African American population in the field of agriculture in the public school is presented. Many of the researchers previously investigating this issue are African American agriculture educators themselves, who have a concern for the absence of African American participation in agriculture education. These researchers have found issues with attitudes, role models, races, quality of the school's agriculture department, counseling, and various other issues relating to reasons African American students show little interest in agriculture (Croom & Alston, 2009; Futrell, 2013; Harris, 2015).

Background Review

A conclusion through the research of Jones, Bowen, Rumberger, and Family Chair of Agriculture (1998a) found "although African American students had less positive attitudes than other students toward the agricultural sciences, such attitudes had limited impact on students enrolling in agricultural science courses. Also the race of the teacher and the quality of the school and agricultural science facilities did not present to be related to whether or not students enrolled in agriculture science courses" (Jones et al.,

1998b, p. 47). According to Jones et al. (1998b) attitude has no effect on the students' attendance in the class, or their interest in studies. Jones et al. (1998b) reported "teachers wishing to enroll more African American students in agricultural science classes need to convince such students of the agricultural sciences' positive future offered them, including challenging educational experiences and rewarding careers" (p. 47).

Teachers relating well to all students.

Another article regarding the qualitative assessment of African American enrollment, also reported (Jones et al., 1998; Vincent & Torres, 2015; Vincent et al., 2014) research findings stating "teachers who could relate well to all students, and were enthusiastic about their programs, had the highest number of African American students in their courses" (p. 19). Boone and Boone (2009) stated that agriculture educators, the FFA organization, and education administrators need to develop a plan to encourage students to enter the agricultural education teaching profession. Boone and Boone (2009) also stated that "... evaluation is needed to determine whether changes need to be made in preservice programs, induction programs, and general teacher in-service opportunities" (p. 29). Jones et al. (1998) found a larger enrollment of African American students in the FNR courses with high technology, science-based curricula. On the other hand, Jones et al. (1998) research showed the larger enrollment of African American students in some AFNR courses were due to suggestions from other students regarding the teacher being considered easy or boring. Further, Boone and Boone (2009) stated, "By adequately preparing teachers at the preservice and entry levels to handle the potential problems of agricultural education teachers, the profession can increase job satisfaction and reduce teacher attrition" (pp. 29-30).

Boone and Boone (2009) noted that any student truly interested in pursuing a career in the field of agricultural technology would have a total interest in learning all they can about agriculture. Likewise, when an agriculture educator has a student of this category, the agriculture educator should do everything possible to help the student pursue the field (Boone & Boone, 2009; Vincent et al., 2014; Vincent & Torres, 2015). As Jones et al. (1998a) explained in their research, schools having an African American teacher had higher African American enrollment, indicating a relationship between African American agricultural educators and enrollment of African American students; there is value in having an African American role model.

Possible attractions to agriculture.

According to Vincent and Torres (2015), and Vincent, Kirby, Deeds and Faulkner (2014), agriculture educators made suggestions for the possibility of attracting more African American students according to Vincent & Torres (2015), and Vincent, Kirby, Deeds, & Faulkner (2014). African American students already enrolled in agriculture might get other students interested in agriculture by demonstrating their accomplishments and the potential for a professional career with an attractive salary. Agriculture educators also feel recruitment for AFNR students should start at the junior high level (Rohs & Anderson, 2001). If a student's interests were determined at that level, perhaps they could see how their interest ties into agriculture, and as the counselor meets with a student, the counselor could show the accomplishment of other students in AFNR courses (Jones et al., 1998).

Regardless of these interesting findings, there are also contradictions in the reports. Jones et al. (1998) also reports findings at a school located in a small town

having an energetic agriculture educator with a strong FFA chapter, and yet the teacher's efforts to recruit and retain African American students were minimal (Jones et al., 1998). On the other hand, most of the students in this report were white females. Other factors influencing students' enrollment in AFNR courses reported by researchers stated a major finding was that the minority students were generally from non-farm, non-rural areas (Martin & Kitchel, 2015; Talbert & Larke Jr., 1995).

Negative perceptions.

Vincent et al. (2014) agreed with the statement from Talbert and Larke Jr. (1995) that "minority students had more negative perceptions regarding agriculture" (p. 38). These students' reasons for not enrolling in AFNR courses were reported to be due to reasons "beyond their control, more barriers to enrolling," and saw no "opportunities for themselves in agricultural careers" (p. 38). The study by Talbert and Larke Jr. (1995) showed fewer African American and Hispanic students living in rural areas, and more white students living in rural areas. Talbert and Larke Jr. (1995) also reported negative personal opinions from the African American and Hispanic students toward the traditional AFNR courses. According to a report by Lawrence, Rayfield, Moore, and Outley (2013), 80% of FFA members were white in a rural community and had the highest percentage of FFA members in relation to agricultural education course enrollments. According to this report more than half of the AFNR students were FFA members, and the majority of agricultural educators were white males (Lawrence, Rayfield, Moore, & Outley 2013).

As stated by researchers, the African American and Hispanic students, when enrolled in an AFNR courses, felt they were there for reasons beyond their control.

Perhaps their parents insisted they enroll in the class with no counseling and regardless of the student's feelings; or perhaps the enrollment office placed them in the class without counseling to determine the student's interests. Minority students need to see the many benefits of "agriculture education as a desirable course rather than a course they were just 'dumped into' by someone else" (Talbert & Lake Jr., 1995, p. 44). Steps need to be taken to change attitudes regarding agriculture (Croom & Alston, 2009; Lawyer & Smith, 2011).

Bowen (1994), at the time he was Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, stated how even though "the number of African American males who graduate from high school has increased significantly since the 1970s, the number that graduate from college is decreasing" (p. 6). Bowen further stated "history refutes the premise that minorities are not interested in the food and agricultural sciences" (p. 6). Bowen also referred to the history of the NFA, which merged with the FFA in 1965. According to Bowen's (1994) research, the NFA was a growing organization and very conscious of the need for agriculture before the merger in 1965. Apparently there were positive and negative differences in opinions regarding the merger, and this merger could have perhaps caused a lack of interest by African Americans in agricultural education. Perhaps there was a feeling of having had something taken away from them, rather than feeling united.

A continuing bias.

Whent (1994) suggested, in her research, the possibility of any embedded biases throughout the impediments to diversity in agricultural education. Whent reflected on

two years prior to the writing of this article, when “for the first time in the history of the University of California at Davis, CA. incoming minority freshmen students outnumbered white students” (p. 9). There are still reports of a shortage in the diverse population (Vincent, 2011; Whent, 1994). Dr. Whent reported there is a continuing bias toward teachers and white students by the African American student.

A national agricultural education survey in 1991 (Whent, 1994) and also a report in 2011 (LaVergne et al., 2011) stated that agriculture educators did not perceive support of students from diverse populations as a problem or concern. These educators did not even consider the female students as minorities. Whent’s (1994) research showed a definite lack of representation by minorities in the agriculture field; and she says “anyone can observe the disparity at any agricultural education meeting, at any level of the profession” (p. 9) (see also Martin & Kitchel, 2015).

Whent (1994) reported “students will perform to the standards set by a teacher” suggesting the performance of a student is determined by the performance of the teacher. Whent reported, “Instructors may unconsciously base their expectations of student performance on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and appearance, instead of on ability” (p. 9) (see also Vincent et al., 2014). This experience could encourage or discourage participation and/or achievement, and the African American student may feel less challenged to reach the highest capability (Martin & Kitchel, 2015).

More than likely, these agriculture educators are unaware of their biases (LaVergne et al., 2011; Vincent et al., 2014). Whent (1994) said when an educator refers to parallel groups using terms such as *men and girls*, rather than *men and women*, are expressing this bias. Embedded biases are noticed in classrooms in the language of the

agriculture educator (Dial, 2014). Agriculture educators should stay aware of any changes in terminology, in an effort to prevent bias opinions from the students and parents. Whent reported in 1994, “Mexican ancestry prefer to be called *Chicano* or *Latino* instead of *Hispanic*, and most Asian students are offended when called *Oriental*” (p. 10, italics in original).

Whent’s (1994) research reported the diverse population does not desire a singled out or separated feeling. The diverse population has no desire for the limelight (Martin & Kitchel, 2015). Minority students involved in clubs “of their own kind” rather than the FFA may be sending a message of “not feeling a part of the agriculture” department (p. 11). “The first step in removing embedded biases is to become aware of the biases . . . Educators should ask their students about the cultural climate in the classroom . . .” (p. 11). Teachers and administrators, as well as parents, need to take time to counsel with minority students and remain aware of feelings and goals (Dial, 2014; Esters & Bowen, 2004).

Agricultural educators most dedicated.

Dr. Eddie A. Moore (1994) was professor of agricultural and extension education at Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI at the time he wrote “Supporting Diversity: A Challenge and Opportunity for the Profession” in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*. Moore reported serving as President of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture (AATEA) in 1983 and during this service he wrote several articles regarding agriculture education. Moore (1994) reported how people he worked with in the AATEA endorsed his “belief that agricultural educators are some of

the most dedicated, hardworking, and committed people we are going to find in any discipline” (p. 4).

In a report by Vincent et al. (2014) titled “The Evaluation of Multicultural Teaching Concerns among Pre-service Teachers in the South,” the authors stated that results in their research showed negligence in teaching pre-service teachers who have a multicultural education course requirement in comparison to pre-service teachers that do not have these course requirements. According to Vincent et al. (2014), preparing agricultural educators for an environment with diverse cultures entails sufficient exposure in terms of general day-to-day life activities. In the report by Vincent et al. (2014), pre-service agricultural educators may sometimes miss opportunities to gain cultural consciousness and self-reflection skills when averting attention away from a diversity issue.

Rather than engaging in conversation to gain valuable knowledge about other cultures, the pre-service teachers do not participate because of inexperience. The lack of participation leads to suppressing diversity issues in the classroom. (Vincent et al., 2014, p. 154)

Vincent et al. (2014) suggest that the majority of pre-service teachers are required to enroll in multicultural education courses; however, “less than one out of every five receive instruction from a faculty member in agricultural education” (p. 161). Vincent and Torres (2015) reported that educators within a diverse FFA membership and AFNR courses had a higher multicultural competence level than teachers in a non-diverse FFA membership and AFNR courses.

Jones and Larke Jr. (2003), writing in “Factors Influencing Career Choices of Ethnic Minorities in Agriculture,” reported “agriculture is the United States’ largest employer, with more than 22 million people employed in some phase from growing food and fiber to selling agricultural products at the retail level” (p. 11). However, Jones and Larke Jr. (2003) reported from their research how “declining minority enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs in recent years compounds the challenge of increasing enrollment in agriculture-related fields” (p. 11).

Jones and Larke Jr. (2003) also reported in their “study of 20 undergraduate students in the Midwest,” with respect to “career development profiles” among participants, that objective factors tended to influence white students, “such as socioeconomic status, intelligence quotient, and family occupational status, while the profiles of minorities tend to be influenced more by subjective indicators, such as personal efficacy, educational aspirations, perception of opportunity structure, support, and influence of significant others” (p. 12).

Misleading agriculture information.

Minorities have perhaps received misleading information regarding the likelihood of limited job opportunities in the field of agriculture (Jones and Larke Jr., 2003; Vincent et al., 2014). However, this is a great misconception (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014b). As stated earlier by Jones and Larke Jr. in their research “agriculture is the United States’ largest employer” (p.11). According to Jaygresh’s (2012) research in the *Baystride Images Journal*, Frederick Douglass and other African Americans realized the job opportunities available for African Americans, because, as they reflect back to times in history, African Americans provided their own needs or had

to depend on the white American. Without agriculture in the United States the only food and clothing would need to come from other countries; therefore, the largest employer in the United States provides food and clothing for all citizens (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014b).

Jones and Larke Jr. (2003) found in their research the significant others of the students who are making a decision to enroll in an agriculture class was found to be measurably important regarding respondents' choices of agriculture-related careers. Therefore, it would seem these significant others should have more consideration when providing a better understanding of the field of agriculture with more involvement in promoting agriculture (Croom & Alston, 2009; Jones & Larke, Jr., 2003; Westbrook & Alston, 2007).

Murphy (2011) reported in an article "America's Largest Private Companies: Food," that food companies' sales were up 6.2% from last year, a growth of 40%; and, Del Monte Foods' sales were over \$5 billion. In Murphy's (2011) research of 41 companies, sales amounted to \$333 billion, compared to sales five years ago which was \$221 billion. Employees for these 41 companies amounted to 508,000, compared to employees five years ago which was 404,000. Murphy (2011) reports of America's top ten largest private companies, "agriculture giant Cargill, the largest private company in America, remains way ahead of its peers with more than three times the sales of runner-up Mars. Food distributors dominate the rest of the top ten" (p. 2).

The United States Department of Agriculture (2014a) was asked, in a series of frequently asked questions from the Economic Research Service, How important is agriculture to the overall economy? The answer to the question,

In 2012, agriculture and related industries had a 4.8 percent value-added share of nominal GDP, consisting of a 1.0 percent share for farms; a 1.4 percent share for processed food, beverage, and tobacco products; a 1.9 percent share for food service and drinking establishments; a 0.2 percent share of textiles and leather apparel; and a 0.2 percent share for forestry, fishing, and hunting. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014a, p. 3)

The United States Department of Agriculture's (2014b), Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture, reported in an article titled: RIO+20 The Future We Want reported that

Agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40% of today's global population. It is the largest source of income and jobs for poor rural households, and 500 million small farms worldwide, most still rainfed provide up to 80% of food consumed in a large part of the developing world. (p. 2)

Freire (2012) noted that expectation is embedded in men's insufficient measures of abilities, searching for communication with others. The desire to encourage diverse students to participate in a never-ending career such as agriculture provides the expectation of helping to promote a better understanding to the diverse student. Developing this desire upon love, humility, and faith, as a moral scholar-practitioner, communication takes a horizontal relationship with mutual trust; thereby, acquiring a better understanding.

Addressing our obvious differences.

Singleton and Linton (2006) and Vincent and Torres (2015) noted that many educators fail to meet the needs of the growing number of diverse students, simply because the commission has been labeled “diversity” (p. 96). Singleton and Linton (2006) and Vincent and Torres (2015) explained that “race is one of many categories of diversity, but making instruction accessible to students of diversity is not a matter of diversity” (p. 96). However, contrary to other researchers’ such as Vincent and Torres (2015), discussions on the subject, Singleton and Linton (2006) want to “ensure quality education by isolating race” (p. 96). Singleton and Linton (2006) stated “isolating race helps educators to understand race and simultaneously to develop real solutions to racial achievement disparities” (p. 96).

Singleton and Linton (2006) also suggested, “rather than experience the discomfort in interracial dialogue, people often put an emphasis on how we are all alike instead of addressing our obvious differences” (p. 63). However, as Whent (1994) expressed in her research, the diverse population do not want to be singled out or separate. Singleton and Linton (2006) further noted “typical diversity trainings are focused around not getting participants upset or too uncomfortable;” and, “state traditional diversity training, however, has been unsuccessful in helping schools close the racial achievement gap” (p. 63). They suggested “strategy, on the other hand, asks participants to agree to experience discomfort so they can deal with the reality of race in an honest and forthright way” (p. 63).

Diversity in the classroom and FFA.

LaVergne (2009) reported the societal force regarding the importance of recruiting diverse students in the field of agriculture. LaVergne (2009) is in agreement with the importance of diverse students as a part of the field of agriculture. LaVergne argued the “presence of diversity in our classrooms should be encouraged and promoted” (2009, p. 5). LaVergne reported “from research of the classes of most teachers in the twenty-first century—unlike those taught 50 years ago—are highly diverse in terms of the cultural, language, racial, and economic backgrounds of the students” (2009, p. 11). The “highly diverse” classes are not the AFNR courses (Martin & Kitchel, 2015; Vincent et al., 2014). Most diverse students, if found in the AFNR courses, are those students who are in the class because of lack of control over being placed in the class. There are exceptions, but very few exceptions. Progressive changes are developing with diverse students enrolling in AFNR courses, but progress is slow (Vincent et al., 2014).

Vincent (2011) posited still another opinion. He stated “teachers in diverse FFA chapters reported higher multicultural competence scores than teachers in non-diverse FFA chapters” (p. xiii). Vincent’s research utilized a “correlational and *ex post facto* design to investigate potential relationships between variables of interest” (p. 94).

Vincent reported

. . . students in non-diverse FFA chapters have less racial color-blindness than students in diverse FFA chapters. In other words, students in non-diverse FFA chapters do not believe society is just and fair. It can be conceived that students in non-diverse FFA chapters observe unfair privileges being rewarded to individuals who are ethnically different from themselves. Therefore, it is

concluded that students in non-diverse FFA chapters are developing attitudes of racial prejudice due to observed unfair privileges and a lack of awareness. (2011, p. 117)

Dewey's theory.

With regard for diversity and the need for diverse students in the field of agriculture, Dewey (2012/1916) discussed these values in a rather poetic way. Dewey stated “an explicit discussion of educational values thus affords an opportunity for review of interests and curriculum, by bringing them into connection with one another” (p. 246). Specific values, according to Dewey, generally relate to education corresponding with advised goals. Necessary knowledge is a substance of value.

Dewey (2012/1916) believed that before teaching could safely convey knowledge and encourage development of new ideas, schooling should provide real examples for demonstration. For the benefit of the student, the result of the experiences is obvious. Open-mindedness should create more for the teacher as well as the student. Dewey stated:

A youth who has had repeated experience of the full meaning of the value of kindness toward others built into his disposition has a measure of the worth of generous treatment of others. Without this vital appreciation, the duty and virtue of unselfishness impressed upon him by others as a standard remains purely a matter of symbols which he cannot adequately translate into realities. (Dewey, 2012/1916, pp. 249-250)

Dewey also stated the theory of educational values “involves not only an account of the nature of appreciation as fixing the measure of subsequent valuations, but an account of the specific direction in which these valuations occur” (p. 253).

Typically students will perhaps compare studies according to the value the students feel for the subject, and “treat them as means to something beyond themselves” (Dewey, 2012/1916, p. 255; Martin & Kitchel, 2015; Wilson, 2015). Dewey explained the way to enable a student to grasp the helpful value of a subject is not to address the student concerning profits in taking the subject, but to let him or her realize personally what studying this subject will help to accomplish.

According to Dewey (2012/1916), “poetry has historically been allied with religion and morals” (p. 256). Dewey stated “poetry has had an enormous patriotic value” (p. 256). He reported, education, without the resource of poetry, has something wrong, and also feels the same applies to values of studies with reference to a “motivating” power (p. 256). Dewey summarizes the value in education and studies by explaining contributions to direct basic values experienced, is the only measure for influential value and resulting values in studies. An inclination to determine different values to each different study, and consider the course of each study as a combination of separated values, results in the separation of social groups and classes.

Perhaps a comparison of this poetic example of choosing subjects according to the value placed on them, with the way people are compared with the lack of diverse students in the field of agriculture is important to consider. Dewey (2012/1916) said it is the responsibility of “education in a democratic social group to struggle against isolation in order that the various interests may reinforce and play into one another” (p. 265).

Summary

In summarizing this chapter, related literature building a background for the research study was reviewed concerning the lack of an African American population in the field of agriculture. Literature in this chapter supports an understanding for the reader to support the significance of the research.

Relevant points that developed included the race of the agriculture educator and the quality of schools and AFNR facilities was examined in relation to enrollment of African American students. Research presents some points to consider in determining issues with enrollment of African American students. Issues with teachers relating well to students, as well as students' issues with teachers, is also discussed; and also, students' attraction to agricultural sciences, and what attracts students to agriculture or what distracts students. Discussed in this chapter were possible attractions for students to become interested in agricultural sciences, as well as possible negative perceptions and biases are considered. Dedicated agricultural educators and the results of a dedicated agricultural educator are discussed. Some research indicated the dedication agricultural educators have for the students, while other research suggests some agricultural educators miss opportunities to have a positive relationship with the students. The problem with information that is misleading in the agriculture education was reported and differences in opinions are addressed. Diversity in the classroom as well as in the FFA was discussed, and Dewey's poetic approach to diversity was observed.

Chapter III presents a discussion of the design for this study and elaborates the method and procedures used in implementing the study including data collection and

analysis. The role of the researcher is discussed as well as how trustworthiness was addressed.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Introduction

The design selected for this research was a qualitative case study. The researcher examined AFNR educator and FFA advisors' perceptions of under representation of African American students in agriculture related programs. Chapter III presents a discussion of the case study method, followed by a section that restates the purpose and guiding research questions for the study. The next section presents a discussion of the participants for the study and the sampling technique. The role of researcher is discussed next, identifying the responsibilities and biases of the researcher. Data collection and data analysis follow with a description of the type of data and process used in collecting the data as well as the schema used to organize and analyze the data. Next, trustworthiness is discussed followed by a section on reporting the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary section.

An Overview of Case Study Method

According to Creswell (2013), a case study is a methodology type of design in qualitative research and is an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry. Creswell further explains a case study research is a qualitative approach in which the

investigator explores a real-life, existing bounded system or multiple bounded systems, in detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and it reports a case description and case theme. Neuman (2011) defined case study research as “research that is an in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about very few units or cases for one period or across multiple periods of time” (p. 42).

The researcher selected the qualitative case study design, which allows the research to study a set of three cases. The qualitative case study design of this study will allow for collecting and analyzing data with the purpose of creating a set of descriptive stories regarding selected detailed events and experiences of the participants. Neuman (2011) stated the case study helps “flesh out” (p. 42) and identify theories of greatest interest. The intent of this case study is to present findings concerning the under representation of African American students in AFNR courses and FFA.

This qualitative case study included interviews with three African American agriculture educators and seeks to understand the perceptions the educators have concerning under representation of African American students. Through researching the cases of the three participants the researcher intended to answer the three guiding research questions, importantly bringing to the foreground the nature of factors influencing student choices not to consider AFNR courses as career options (Thomas, 2011).

Restating the Purpose and Research Questions

African American agriculture educators, as role models for African-American students, are seemingly over-looked. The development of this research will provide new awareness regarding the lack of participation by diverse students in the field of AFNR

technology as a profession. Positive information is also discussed regarding the advantages available through the FFA. AFNR technology has developed greatly in the past thirty years, and the interest in agriculture by the diverse population has increased, as well; however, there is a need to impress the professional fields available through agriculture, and discern the basis for the low ratio of African American agricultural educators. The intended outcome of study was to assist the younger generation in realizing the need for agriculture, will encourage African American students to pass lessons in agriculture down from one generation to the next, to acquire the knowledge to care for animals, to understand the technique of farming crops, and have the ability to preserve food or provide clothing.

With the consequences for the lack of agriculture in mind, all students regardless of race or gender need to understand the need for more education in all areas of agriculture. With the rise in the diverse population, a continuous need for more knowledge in agriculture increases. The lack of a larger number of diverse students in agricultural classes demonstrates a greater lack of interest in agriculture than in other cultures. Students need encouragement to develop a desire for education in agriculture.

Four research questions guide this study:

1. How are African American students being placed in AFNR courses?
2. How do African American students in middle and intermediate schools receive information needed regarding agriculture, allowing these students to have a better understanding of the possibilities available for a career in the field of agriculture?
3. How are African American high school students made aware of the opportunities in agriculture, such as: marketing, merchandising, meat and produce judging,

meat production, fruit production, and many other opportunities existing in the field of agriculture?

4. How can agriculture educators increase the interest of African American students in AFNR courses, FFA, and agriculture as a profession?

Participants

Participants for the case study were three African American agriculture educators, currently serving as agricultural educators, teaching within an AFNR program in the state of Texas. The selection process for participants necessitated the need for foreknowledge of the issue, and each participant was selected based on that knowledge.

The researcher met each of the agriculture educators while attending FFA conventions and agriculture educators' professional development conferences, as well as face-to-face interviews. With the concern for the lack of African American students enrolled in agriculture programs, the researcher believed it was important to become acquainted with African American agriculture educators.

Each of the three agriculture educators were met at different times in different meetings, but in the process of getting acquainted with each, the researcher discovered each of these teachers were indeed agriculture educators having the same concerns regarding the lack of interest in the African American students in agriculture and agriculture programs. At the time of meeting and briefly visiting with each, addresses and phone numbers were exchanged in order to arrange for later communication pending approval of the study.

The researcher met the first African American agriculture educator at an FFA contest. After introductions, the researcher and agriculture educator discussed the issue

of lack of representation of African American students in FFA, and he wanted to help any way he could to find answers. He agreed to meet with me for an approved interview on the issue. The interview took place on February 10, 2016, in the agriculture educator's classroom at Lincoln High School and lasted approximately six hours. Because the interview took place over 200 miles from the researcher's home, level one, two, and three questions were asked in this face-to-face interview. Level four questions were asked and answered through voice calls, emails, and meeting at FFA contests. The first interviewee's name and school affiliations have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

The second African American agriculture educator was met in the same way at another FFA contest, and she, likewise, was prepared to do anything to help discover why African American students showed such a lack of interest in agriculture. This interview also took place on February 10, 2016, at a restaurant in Houston, Texas. The interview took place while having dinner and lasted approximately three hours. Level one, two, and three questions were asked during this face-to-face interview. Level four questions were asked and answered through voice calls, emails, and meeting at FFA contests. The second interviewee's name and school affiliations have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

The third African American agriculture educator was not located as easily and was found by asking the previous contacts for another reference. The third educator was identified and contacted after IRB approval. The interview took place on May 10, 2016, in the agriculture educator's classroom at Park Vista High School and lasted approximately six hours. Level one, two, and three questions were asked during this one face-to-face interview. Level four questions were asked and answered through voice

calls, emails, and meeting at FFA contests. The third interviewee's name and school affiliations have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

The Role of Researcher

As the instrument in this qualitative study, this researcher narratively describes the role of the researcher. The researcher as the instrument in the study had an ethical and methodological responsibility to ensure that the study was conducted without bias or lack of ethical practice, including data collection and analysis.

As the instrument of the research, the researcher was responsible for examining relevant research literature to develop a conceptual framework to guide the study, and selecting specific methods in preparation for data collection and analysis that were aligned with case study research. In particular, the role of researcher was to familiarize himself with specific and relevant research literature regarding the lack of interest in the African American student leading to the lack of African American agriculture educators.

Conducting a Case Study.

In conducting the case study, the researcher was responsible for identifying, selecting, and interviewing three participants. During the study, the researcher was also responsible for ensuring fidelity of the data and that the voices of participants remained primary in writing the narrative interpretations of the findings. The researcher was also responsible for reporting the findings in an unbiased form and ensured that the participants were protected at all times. Each participant's name and school affiliations have been changed to ensure confidentiality. As well, any identifying information pertaining to demographics or geographical location were carefully considered and edited for confidentiality.

Researcher bias.

The role of researcher included self-awareness of bias that he might introduce into the study. The researcher had professional experience as an agriculture educator; therefore there was an element of bias to be considered. The researcher became concerned about the lack of African American students in agriculture programs and the lack of participation in agricultural contests. The researcher first noted the lack of African American students while attending a contest with his students. It was noted at the first Career Development Event (CDE) contest attended, the one African American student on our team was the only African American student among all the schools attending the contest. The contest was Meat Judging. Students were required to judge cuts of meat. The presence of this African American student was obvious to all other students attending the contest. It appeared no one attending the contest expected the attendance of an African American student. This experience established the basis for the researcher's interest in the problem addressed in this study.

As an experienced agriculture educator, it was the researcher's bias that there was a relationship between having African American agriculture educators in programs and having higher African American student enrollment; therefore the need exists for more African American agricultural educators serving as role models for students. More deliberate efforts should be dedicated to techniques encouraging diversity of students into agricultural education.

Researcher assumptions.

Researcher assumptions, not unlike bias, require self awareness on the part of the researcher. The researcher had an assumption that more counseling with students is

necessary in addressing the problem set forth in the study. As a student's interests are determined through counseling, interest in agriculture could develop. Adequate counseling could ensure that agriculture education students were placed in a desirable course rather than a course they were pushed into for lack of knowing in what courses diverse students should be placed.

The researcher, as an agriculture educator, has experienced a student's ability to recruit other students into AFNR courses. Another assumption was that counseling with parents and emphasizing advantages in the AFNR courses, the agriculture educator could provide more appealing educational activities in an effort to encourage enrollment and ensure attendance.

Related to counseling, there was an assumption that students in middle and intermediate schools should receive information needed regarding agriculture to allow the student to consider the possibilities of a career in the field of agriculture. When a student has no idea what to do with his or her future career, counselors should discuss with the student the student's interest and what direction the student might desire. African American students need awareness of opportunities available in agriculture.

There was an assumption, on the part of the researcher, that attitudes need changing regarding the field of agriculture. Emphasis is too often placed on how much we are all alike, rather than speaking to our obvious differences. We are not all alike; we all are different and have our own likes and dislikes. Each and every student has the right to individual care, treatment, and attention.

There was an assumption that students need to understand the agricultural sciences' affirmative future offered to them and the inspiring educational experiences that

awaits them. It is important for an agriculture educator to relate well with all students, having an enthusiastic positive attitude about the agriculture programs. There was an assumption that agriculture educators with positive attitudes will have the highest number of African American students in their class.

Data Collection

Data collection provides information for an in-depth story for a tremendous understanding of answers to the research questions (Thomas, 2011). Data collected, including personal observations, assisted in the interviews with the African American agriculture educators. Information received from each of these agriculture educators contributed to a positive investigation. Sample communications such as questions to be asked, informed consent forms, and data collection protocols were provided.

Initial communication was made with each of the participants to attain agreement to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Subsequently, once all participants agreed to take part in the study, a schedule of days/times was organized for each participant.

A four-level interview protocol was used to collect data. During the first interview session, the researcher explained to each participant the purpose of the study and the specifics of the interview process. Each participant was asked to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Subsequent to obtaining informed consent, the interview process began with level one, two, and three interview questions (see Appendix C). Following interviews, the researcher organized, transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interview. The fourth level of the interview followed a similar protocol for developing questions. The four-level interview protocol was used to collect individual participant data, with the last level of the interview process designed to ensure data saturation.

Personal observations and accounts of circumstances were another data collection used in completing this study. The researcher recorded his own personal observations and also recorded communication regarding beliefs and experiences related to the data collection. This recording took the form of a researcher journal. The journal served as point of data in the study. Discussions with the interviewees were very important and any question asked during data collection was designed to collect facts or feelings regarding the subject or issue (Thomas, 2011).

Data collection by observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Observations are centered on this researcher's purpose and questions. Observation is required for the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and the researcher's own behavior during the observation (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) has directed the researcher to "use your senses, including sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste" (p. 166) for a concentrated interview.

According to Creswell (2013), the observer is generally involved in the subject researched in one way or another focuses on two forms of engagement: participating and observing. The researcher as observer, while observing the interview, was acting as an interviewer and became part of the circumstances and systematically observed for any information, reporting facets of interest.

All data and related materials for the research study, including communications and informed consent forms, was secured in a locked file in the researcher's home, with only the researcher having had access to the file. Data and related materials were only used for the stated purpose of the dissertation study. In accordance with IRB guidelines, after a period of three years all data and materials will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

All collected data was systematically organized and analyzed, including personal observations and communications, interview data, and researcher journal. There are various methods to analyze qualitative data collected confirming the data results will remain scientific and unbiased. In this study, the researcher organized data for analysis and defined the meaning of the data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Once the data was organized, the researcher transcribed the interviews for each participant, provided opportunity for participants to provide member checks on the transcriptions prior to analysis of the data. Once the member checks were completed, the research began the process of analyzing the transcription narratives to determine themes/patterns in the data.

A coding system including open and axial coding was used to analyze the data (Creswell, 2013; Vincent & Kirby, 2015). The researcher developed detailed descriptions, subjects, magnitudes, and interpretations regarding views of the agriculture educators interviewed, as well as observations by the agriculture educator researcher. Once each set of data for the three participants was analyzed and coded, the researcher examined the data for emergent themes and compared/contrasted themes within and across the three participant interview data sets. The researcher completed the analysis of the data and the data was organized into narrative form with narrative interpretations, including participant voices to ensure fidelity of the narratives. The dominant voice was that of the participants with the voice of the researcher as narrator making sense of the data sets.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is confidence placed on the outcome of this study, and the degree of confidence in the research (Creswell, 2013). The standards for trustworthiness are intricate for thoughtful review. Standard methods may not explain the experiences of consigned interviews. “Positionality of truth refers to the concept that what is true for one person may not be true for another (Martin & Kitchel, 2015, p. 126).” Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. Transcriptions were verified by the interviewees to confirm the transcripts report of the intent of the interviewee’s responses (Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

Ensuring the words of the interviewed individuals was the center of the interviews and critical to the research, the interviewee’s words were detailed, explanations were developed, observations made, and quotes from the interviewees were made. The interviewees also received results for corroboration. The interviews, transcripts, coding, and researcher’s considerations were retained for the confirmability and reliability of the results and the viability to direct impending studies.

Data collected for this research was selected in an effort to discover previous research regarding the issue of the lack of interest in African American students in agriculture (Boone & Boone, 2009; Croom & Alston, 2009; Futrell, 2013; Harris, 2015; LaVergne, 2009; LaVergne, Larke, Elbert, & Jones, 2011; LaVergne, Lawyer & Smith, 2011; McLennan & Garvin, 2012; Wilson, 2015). The need to find real reasons regardless of what reasons are discovered is essential to the success of African Americans recruited into AFNR courses.

Reporting the Findings

When the data needed for the study was collected and analyzed, writing the report was in order. The first consideration in writing the report was to consider how the audience will respond to the report. Knowing the audience the report was written for allowed the researcher to determine writing styles, words to use, or any other language necessary to aim at the audience reading the report. It is important to take all audiences into consideration when writing the research report for the study (Yin, 1989).

Research was presented in a written format that allows other researchers to feel more comfortable to evaluating the research (Yin, 1989). There are five characteristics to remember and follow in developing an exceptional case study. Three case studies and a cross-case analysis by this researcher provided clear and complete proofs collected by this researcher, and conditions included which are not synthetic, but consistent with situations affecting the results of this study (Yin, 1989). While developing the three case studies and cross-case analysis, this researcher concentrated on the development of a report piquing the interest of audiences of many backgrounds thereby reaching a deduction regarding the information compiled in this case, and creating a desire to read the complete report (Yin, 1989).

Summary

A qualitative method case study was selected for this research. Examination of other selected researchers' studies in various environments aided in developing this study. Design of the study was discussed. An overview of a case study method was reviewed, and performing the case study was discussed. The purpose of the study and the research questions were restated and selection of participants for the study was discussed,

as well as the role of the researcher. Researcher biases noted the lack of African American students in the field of agriculture; and the researcher noted assumptions. Data collection through research and interviews with three African American agriculture educators was provided for information and understanding. The data collection and analysis methods of reporting the findings to be discussed, and the trustworthiness of the interviews were provided, and reporting all the findings discussed.

CHAPTER IV

Kyle Peters

The School

Lincoln High School is a suburban school located southwest of Houston, TX. Lincoln is one of five high schools in the Lincoln Independent School District. Lincoln's student population consists of grades 9 thru 12, with a school population of 1,507. Student population has shown a decrease between the school years 2009-2010 and 2014-2015. Lincoln's student population changes are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Lincoln High School Student Population – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	2,132	1,507
African American	551 (25.8%)	377 (25.0%)
Hispanic	885 (41.5%)	765 (50.8%)
White	551 (25.8%)	261 (17.3%)

This data reflects that over the last five years this school has seen a:

- 0.8% decrease in the total population of African American students;

- 9.3% increase of Hispanic students;
- 8.5% decrease in the number of white students.

Lincoln's student enrollment changes in FFA are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Lincoln High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	19	22
African American	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Hispanic	1 (5%)	3 (14%)
White	8 (42%)	14 (64%)

This data reflects that over the last five years this school has seen a:

- 1% increase in the number of African American students;
- 9% increase of Hispanic students;
- 22% increase in the number of white students.

State Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention/Competitions

Every state has an annual State FFA Convention. Texas' Convention is held in the month of July. The locations rotate between Dallas, Fort Worth, and Corpus Christi, as these are some of the few places that can handle the amount of participants at the Convention. Over 10,000 Texas students attend representing the majority of Texas FFA chapters. All FFA officers and delegates, as well as any student receiving an award are invited to attend. Attendance depends on the approval of each individual school district. Kyle takes as many students as the district will allow.

FFA has Leadership Development Events (LDEs), in which students compete in areas where student leadership is the focus. These events are held during the fall. During the years from 2009 – 2014, Kyle has had students participate in Radio Broadcasting, Senior Creed Speaking, and Senior Quiz teams.

During spring, Career Development Events (CDEs), which are contests that concentrate on skills and other areas that could be a future career for FFA students, are held. Kyle has focused on Dairy Cattle Judging and Livestock Judging during the years from 2009 – 2014.

FFA is a co-curricular activity, which means the contests are aligned with the curriculum in agriculture classes. Because of this, there are many contests from which to choose. Some agriculture educators choose to focus on certain events each year. The events mentioned above are not the only events Kyle's chapter has competed in these are just the ones his chapter has competed in most.

The Interview – Kyle Peters

Meeting with Kyle Peters was a special event for me. I knew his father from a while back and was looking forward to visiting with Kyle. Kyle was the one who inspired me to research the issue of the lack of African Americans in Future Farmers of America (FFA) as he shared his thoughts on the issue when we met at the FFA State Contest in 2015. We visited there at the contest for a few minutes under a mesquite tree, sharing our concern for the lack of African Americans in the FFA and the field of agriculture.

Kyle is currently the only agriculture educator at Lincoln High School. He began his teaching career at Lewis High School in Lewis, TX, in August of 2008. He moved

from there to Barton High School, on to Kalvin High School, and finally to Lincoln for the 2015-2016 school year. Over the years, Kyle's list of student accomplishments has grown into an impressive one including: Breed Championships (the best animal of a specific breed, for example, Angus cattle), Grand Champions (the best animal of all breeds of a species being shown), Reserve Grand Champions (second place animal of all breeds of a species being shown), and State Qualifying Meats teams (teams that judge wholesale and retail cuts of meat based on market trends such as quality and yield).

Kyle and I met for the interview February 10, 2016, in his classroom, as well as in the truck driving down the road. Kyle was very pleased to assist me with my research on this subject for my dissertation and looked forward to sharing his feelings on the issue. When I met Kyle at the FFA convention and visited with him regarding my concern for the African American population in the FFA, I emailed my professors at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), and I told them that I felt my dissertation had just found me.

I have a diverse group at Longview High School, and these students are very special to me; when I showed up at the Houston Stock Show and had the only kids of any kind of color there, it was like a startling arousal. I had not realized what was going on around me until it was my students, my kids; it was an eye-opener. I was taking a class in diversity and the class had made me aware of it, and my kids also made me aware of it. But when we walked into that convention center, I actually witnessed the issue. Otherwise, I might have just kept my head above the clouds, thinking it is normal. That is where this topic came from.

Kyle's childhood.

Getting into the questions, I asked Kyle to describe his childhood. He is from rural areas in Southeast Texas. He graduated from Thomas High School. Kyle was involved in the school's FFA program all four years of high school. He was also involved in Junior FFA and 4H previous to high school. When I asked what he valued most about the FFA program, he said,

There were so many opportunities if you actually just tried, if you try to do something and at least put your mind to it. A student didn't have to be the smartest person, and let me explain what I mean. My school had a livestock judging team and had practice every morning at 7:30, but no one would ever show up. The only reason I showed up to practice every morning was because my dad had to be in Houston where he was an ag teacher, and he would drop me off. I would just watch the practice video alone because no one else showed up. My ag teacher never came out of his office to explain anything to me. One weekend I was a high point individual at the local county fair, but I felt it was not because of practice alone; you've got to have some background in it.

Before the good opportunities he experienced in FFA, Kyle faced challenges at a young age during his first year in 4-H.

I was spit on by one of my leaders. She made me work in the back of the concession stand at one of the fairs. My dad had signed me up to handle money with my 4H group, but I packed ice because that is what I was told to do. This was my first encounter of having difficulty to having access to what the other kids had.

Kyle wishes he could go back because knowing what he knows now he feels he could probably have done even better. He said, “Ag is too easy and all you have to do is apply yourself to succeed. I had a good experience. I was, and still am, self-motivated, and that is all a student really needs; no one can really push you. Without self-motivation a student cannot do anything. Self-motivation is what I learned in ag.”

Kyle’s college years.

I asked Kyle to tell me about his college experience and some of the challenges he faced. He said,

I knew I was always going to be an ag major. At first I had actually decided to be a vet, and that was what I went to school for. And because of the difficulty in science classes, I decided to be an ag teacher because I knew, really and truthfully, that was my calling. I remember having difficulty in college. It wasn’t that I couldn’t do the work, but I was not mature enough to understand a student has to go to class. You’ve got to show up every day. I just figured if I was paying for it, then I could go out and party every night. At some point I realized I had to really grow out of that. I feel the reason it took so long to graduate was not my plan, it was God’s plan. Because if I had graduated in my first four years of college, being of the mindset I was, I wouldn’t be here today. I would not be teaching ag today. It took me eight years to grow up. My parents had been on my back for years and years and years, and when I finally got that freedom at college, I was ready to run like a wild bull. It took me some time to get reengaged and get back in it, but my major was ag, and I went to school without anything and teaching ag was my backup plan when I really wanted to study vet medicine.

Kyle faced challenges during his college career, not so much with the courses or professors, but with his cohorts.

They would always try to bluff you out. They looked the part, but they didn't know anything about ag. I hate to say it like that. They wore the Hooey hats and the starched jeans and all that and at that point in my life, I wasn't really into that look. I had been in ag all my life, so wearing a pair of starched jeans didn't make you; it didn't make a fiddle of beans. The people I went to class with were more of my difficulty. They were the ones I had issues with when they would try to call my bluff. A lot of those guys didn't realize they weren't going to school with some kid who decided he was just going to be an ag teacher overnight; I grew up in it.

Kyle's feelings about racism.

Kyle said that he felt, as we continued to talk, I would find out that he is not going to tell anything about racism, because it does exist, but that is not his issue. Kyle said his issue is that people see him and assume he knows nothing.

I remember working with a guy who looked the part; he had the big black beard, wore the jeans, and had the chew in his back pocket. Everybody assumed that he knew more than me, when actually he just decided to be an ag teacher at the last minute because he couldn't get anything else. People would take him more serious than they would me, and that always rubbed me the wrong way. You'll hear Amber say it, and you'll hear other people say it, not because we all talk about it, but we always have to walk a different walk than everybody else does. I don't call it racism; we just get treated differently. People look at us differently.

They don't expect us to know anything. They think we know how to do basketball and football. People think the African American is good at those things, but outside that area, they are not supposed to know anything about ag, and some of them don't. But for those who do, I take a lot of pride in this job.

Kyle said, "I don't ever want to bash a white man because they are one of my predecessors that I teach with, but I think they're angry." He said his dad was angry and hated white people, and still does to this day. He said,

My dad doesn't trust anybody, and he'll tell you straight up to watch that white boy because he'll stab you in the back. That was the way I grew up. I had to really decide for myself if the situation is true, but not everyone is that way.

My wife is white, so sometimes I have to really not see color because my children are not black, and they are not white. Not one or the other. And there are some good people out there. I don't think there is anybody that can be trusted, though.

It has made it very difficult for me to live a normal life style. It's insane. I got home last night at 10:00. It's not that anyone else has done anything more or less than me; it's just that I need to be present at the facility, and talk with the kids and figure out what's going on with my program in order for it to grow. If I don't do it, someone is going to write that down and call it in, and I'll lose my job. I have to walk an extra step. That is my only anger issue, because no one is any better black or white, but that's just the way it is.

Kyle spoke of another difficulty.

The reason you're not going to find a bunch of African American teachers is that this job is not about what you can do on paper, because I have applied at Katy

High School four of the last eight years and have never gotten a call back. And if you look at the types of people they have hired, they're not even qualified enough for the job. They're just coming out of school with no background what so ever. I have always wondered why my application was always pushed aside when I have all the credentials and these others don't. I've won a major show, personally and with students, gone to State with teams, gone to State with LDEs and won, and all that's on paper. So, why wouldn't you want that at your school with diversity? I look back and think maybe nobody wants to work with me because maybe I appear as an angry person. I try to make sure I don't appear as an angry person. I just try to stay in my lane and not get in the middle of things and not be bothered with other people, because either you want me to sing and dance, or you want me to teach ag. I'm there for the kids, not to play the politicking game.

The students.

Kyle told me of a student in his freshman class who didn't want to participate. Kyle asked the student why he took the class if he wasn't going to participate. This situation had Kyle thinking back about whom to give credit to for his knowledge and desire for being an agriculture educator.

I'm not sure whether to credit my ag teacher, my dad, or my dad's brother.

Everybody that has ever been around me has given me a tool to be successful. It wasn't always a black person, either. My dad probably did more than anybody else, but as far as who put the spark in me, I think it was my ag teacher, but maybe it was just in me all the time.

I told Kyle I often have students that have been “dumped” in my class because there is nowhere else to put them. Kyle told me he knew exactly what I was talking about.

It happens to everyone. I don't think it's a race thing. How far is an ag teacher willing to go with that kid that's been put in his class, and he's got a hoodie on and has already blocked out to the world. How do we get that kid to see what we are doing? Sometimes I just go in there and pull that kid aside and just talk to him for a minute; I try to just get on his level for a minute. No one wants to do that with a kid; we don't even have time for it. But if we don't get him to know us for what we are and what we stand for, they are never going to get on board. The battle I'm having in my classroom right now, in my own community where I'm from, is these African American kids are set in a mentality, and I can't change them because I can't relate to that. I had a conversation yesterday with a young lady, a very sweet girl; she could have been my daughter. She told me that she likes ghetto boys. She went on to say that she likes them “niggers” that wear their pants down here. I tried to talk to her about those being the type of boys that leave you with a baby, and they're going to make another one somewhere else. They aren't any good. You should want somebody that's got some head on their shoulders, but she told me she wants a roughneck. I told her to come see me in ten years when she's trying to figure out how she's going to keep the lights on with a grocery bill because you have three kids and don't have a man around, then tell me how that roughneck is going. When that's all you see every day, it's very hard to change that.

Kyle lays most of the blame on television today.

If I'm looking at TV this day and age, the only people that look like me are comedians, basketball players, or football players. Crime, not that we're the only ones that are criminals; but that's just a plain and simple fact, but there's other people doing crime, but we only see us. Gatorade and Sprite commercials, what are they doing? They show us bouncing a basketball. That's all we're good for, that is all we know, and that's all we're going to ever have.

Kyle said that there are a lot more kids he sees now in the rural areas who want to be an agriculture educator. They don't realize the road they are about to cross.

I think the kids see ag teachers that look more and more like them. The problem I have with FFA is they want to cater to people that have money. They don't want to deal with this kid over here that's poor. Our programs are not getting more country; they are getting more urban. We have to adjust or we won't have a job in ten years.

Possible solutions.

Kyle recalls a meeting he was invited to about two or three years ago. He has forgotten what it was called, but says black agriculture educators were invited to this meeting to discuss why there were not more African American kids in ag programs.

It actually turned into a knock down drag out argument where nothing got accomplished. I broke down and felt very disappointed because the wrong people were being questioned. The white teachers are the ones who need to be asked these questions. The African American ag teachers are bringing in African American students; ask the white teachers why they are not hauling African

American students to contests. It is because they are not promoting ag to those students.

I asked Kyle if he had any ideas about what needed to be done. Should teachers be replaced because they are not letting in all kids? Kyle thinks yes and no.

The school's part is to promote the program better, inform parents and students that ag is not just animals. The teacher's part is to make the program universal so the kid sitting in the back is interested. It may not be that he wants to raise an animal, you may not be able to get him as an FFA member that first year, but you're going to catch him doing something.

Summary Reflections

My interview with Kyle was an eye-opening experience for me. I realize how fortunate I am to have grown up the way I did, not having to really prove my worth or abilities because of my skin color. It makes me sad to think that the agriculture world can still be so close-minded when it comes to skin color. Kyle had a long, hard road to travel growing up, and fortunately, he made it.

Although Kyle and I have traveled different roads in our lives, we do struggle with similar problems in our agriculture departments. The biggest problem we face is students that are "dumped" into our programs that have no desire to be there. Perhaps it is due to the lack of time our school counselors take to get to know the students to find out what their interests truly are. These kids are typically the students that are low academically and have discipline issues; and quite often are African American. Kyle says we have to just talk to these kids, get down on their level. He knows most teachers do not have time for these kinds of talks, and some, quite frankly, just do not want to do

it. It is a necessary step teachers must take to connect with those students; it is necessary to let those students know what agriculture is all about.

CHAPTER V

Amber Cooper

The School

Davidson opened its doors in 2012. It is an urban school located in Houston, TX, and is part of the Allbright Independent School District. During the 2012-2013 school year Davidson High School served students in grades 9 and 10 with a student population of 1,672. The 2013-2014 school year included grade 11 with a student population of 1,679, and finally the 2014-2015 school year served grades 9 thru 12 with a student population of 2,542. Davidson's population changes are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Davidson High School Student Population – 2012-2013 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2012-2013	2014-2015
Total	1,672	2,542
African American	631 (37.7%)	923 (36.3%)
Hispanic	946 (56.6%)	1,465 (57.6%)
White	20 (25.8%)	24 (0.9%)

This data reflects that over the last two years this school has seen a:

- 1.4% decrease in the total population of African American students;
- 1% increase in the number of Hispanic students;
- 24.9% decrease in the number of white students.

Davidson's student enrollment changes in FFA are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Davidson High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2012-2013 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2012-2013	2014-2015
Total	43	77
African American	18(41.9%)	33 (42.9%)
Hispanic	25 (58.1%)	39 (50.6%)
White	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)

This data reflects that over the last two years this school has seen a:

- 1% increase in the number of African American students;
- 7.5% decrease in the number of Hispanic students;
- 1.3% increase in the number of white students.

State Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention/Competitions

As stated in the previous chapter, every state has an annual State FFA Convention. All FFA chapters are welcome to attend, but attendance is the decision of each school district. For some districts, they may not be able to afford it, as it is very costly to attend. The Convention lasts five days, so a hotel stay is required, along with transportation costs and food costs. Amber is fortunate to work for a district that allows her to travel to the convention. She takes as many students as the district will allow.

During the years 2012 – 2014, Amber's students have competed in LDEs including Greenhand Creed Speaking, Greenhand Quiz, Senior Creed Speaking, and Senior Quiz. Amber's students only competed in one CDE in 2014, which was Livestock Judging.

The Interview – Amber Cooper

My second case study was Amber Cooper. She is the agriculture educator at Davidson High School. Amber began her teaching career in August 2005, at Mayton High School in Fossil Ridge ISD located southwest of Houston. After a year there, Amber moved to Colorado where she taught one year at Lawson High School. She moved back to Texas, Houston area, and started her career with Allbright ISD, first at Edith Ninth Grade School for four years, then to her current position at Davidson High School in 2012. Amber has several accomplishments to be proud of. Some of these are being on the Texas FFA Ford Leadership Selection Committee, and receiving her instructor certification from National Center for Construction Education and Research. Amber can also boast about being the first black woman agriculture educator in Texas.

Amber's childhood.

Amber was eager to begin and started with a little about her family history. She grew up in Third Ward, Houston, right next to downtown.

Houston had the First Ward, Third Ward, Fourth Ward, and Fifth Ward right outside downtown; nobody ever talked about the Second Ward growing up. A lot of those Wards are historically known as black settlements on the outskirts of downtown Houston. Houston was settled, and the Heights were where the white people lived, and the black people lived in the Wards. I had no experience with

agriculture growing up, and I would always watch “In the Heat of the Night” with my grandmother. If I wasn’t in ag, I would probably be a cop or something like that with authority. That would probably be my next choice.

My freshman year in high school I decided to go into law enforcement and attended High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. In Houston they have a high school for law profession, they have a high school for performing arts; that was cool, but it wasn’t enough. I took one intro class that first year into law enforcement, and it just didn’t keep my interest. During my freshman year, I decided I didn’t like the school, because it was boring and was more of a concentration academy.

She thought she had a very dysfunctional childhood life because her parents were divorced when she was in the first grade; then her mom went back to an abusive relationship.

My mother had been married three times, and me and my siblings had three different dads. That’s how I grew up. I was involved in ROTC my ninth and tenth grade years, so when I got to tenth grade at Bellaire High School, I had that foundation of leadership my first two years, but the summer before tenth grade, the counselor still counseled. In the counselor’s office there was a picture of a big cow. My counselor would actually talk to me and ask me what I was going to do for the rest of my life. I didn’t pass any classes, and I told the counselor I didn’t know what I was going to do. My counselor asked me to take an ag class, and I agreed. The counselor told me all I had to do was do my work, so I went to the class. My teacher was Melissa Dinmen (sp). I think Ms. Dinmen graduated from

Sam Houston State University (SAM), but I'm not sure; and that was the last year Ms. Dinmen taught. Mickey Calloway came in after. They were my first two ag teachers. Ms. Calloway said if anyone wants a pig or a lamb, bring \$200. I went home and asked my mom for \$200; she gave it to me, and I got a lamb.

I knew nothing about lambs and I had no connection all my years. Growing up as a kid, I always took dry beans out of the pantry and grew them on the porch in the ghetto. We lived in a 4-unit apartment complex, and I had never made a connection. I was always trying to blow up something. I would take one chemical with another chemical and shake it up, and those things always seemed to connect me with agriculture. When I went through my certification and studied floral design, I would say, 'I've been doing this forever because my mom was a florist and a seamstress.' It seems like me and my mother did a wedding every Saturday. So I feel like I have been doing agriculture all my life. I didn't go for the big ranch and have cows or anything like that, but I did have something to connect with the profession.

In high school, she was the only African American in her chapter. That didn't bother her, though.

Everybody was real nice about it. I had friends and relationships that were life changing experiences. All the black kids at school made fun of me and called me "Howdy" because I wore Rocky Mountain jeans; I was laughing all the way to the bank, though.

Amber had a great experience at Bellaire. She said she would go back if she could. Her senior year, Bubba Schultz was her teacher and that was his first class ever.

Amber said that Houston was not like Chicago or New York with its subways and railways, but that the Third and Forth Wards were pretty urban.

Amber's college years.

Sam Houston State University (SAM) was never in her radar, but she didn't want to go to Prairie View for some reason. She didn't know if it was that she didn't want the stigma that she was going to a black school or because she had a cousin that was ten years older than her and still went to Prairie View. She was determined to graduate, but not from Prairie View. She didn't have the GPA to get into a lot of places, either, because of family issues, not focusing, and she had a math deficit because she was moved from school to school beginning in third grade.

I was going to go to Blinn College then transfer to A&M. Me and another girl I was in FFA with decided we were going to Blinn. We both were admitted, and together we put a housing deposit down the same day. About a week later my friend gets a letter saying she had been approved for housing. I didn't get that letter, and we signed up to be roommates. I called Blinn to find out what was going on. The lady put me on hold for a while then came back and told me that the friend's mother knew someone and called in a favor. They had no more housing available, so I ended up at Prairie View. As it turned out, that was the best decision of my life. I was bored the first year because I learned a lot in high school. At Prairie View I learned many external things concerning ag that a lot of ag students at other universities were not getting. I didn't even know how to drive a tractor or how to grow crops.

Amber continues on and says she decided to go back to graduate school at Sam Houston. She chose SAM because she felt that was still the better place for her versus A&M. Amber made up her mind to teach and started the certification process.

I student taught in Fossil Ridge ISD under Beth Barker. Speaking freely, I love Beth, and I needed a “Beth” in reality. Maybe God put her on my path. There’s this persona of who people think Beth is, but she really is a nice person, down to earth, but going through an experience like that with Beth made me put on another layer.

I met Beth when I was working for the USDA. I was in the experiment garden one day in Fossil Ridge County, and Beth walked up to me and asked me what I was doing. I remembered her from Area 3 when I was in high school.

Beth told her me I should be an ag teacher, and at that time I had never thought about that. Beth told me I would be the first black female ag teacher in the state of Texas if I did. Breaking a record sounded good, so I thought I would try that.

Amber said that a couple of summers before that in 4-H camp, teaching those kids about agriculture and just kind of teaching them about life, she never thought she was trying to be an agriculture educator. But Amber thought she would really like to be able to impact kids and teach them about where their food comes from. So Amber went through the program at Sam Houston, and when she got ready to pick her block she told Dr. Olsen she wanted to teach with Beth Barker.

I saw some racism on the block, some separatism because I’m not the country girl; I drive up in a BMW. I won’t buy a truck until I get some land. I just have a

different philosophy about how I live my life and that was very evident through student teaching in that block.

I was the teacher's assistant, but the students in the class didn't respect me; they wanted me to know as much as Dr. Kelly, and I was not Dr. Kelly. Dr. Kelly is a world renowned reproductive person when it comes to livestock; he's been doing it for years. I had to teach his classes when he would be out of town. I could teach, but not lecture like Dr. Kelly. That was when I decided to leave Prairie View and go to SAM. That really opened my eyes that I was different, and there was nothing I could do about it. It doesn't matter how many degrees I earn or even if I have a kid that wins grand champion in the stock show; there still won't be the same level of respect even though I do the same things that other teachers do. We look different, but we have a lot in common.

Amber feels we're all motivated for internal and external reasons, and she feels like whatever gets you there, it gets you there.

Amber said SAM had been an eye-opening experience, but is so thankful for those experiences.

It is these experiences that have made me a good ag teacher. It is about every kid. I expose every kid to the FFA experience, whether they want it or not. I saw how Beth ran her program, where she trained the quiz teams, and she worked with the smartest kids so the other kids had no experience in FFA; and because you're not on the wood shop team, or you're not on the quiz team, or ag mechanics team, you don't have any experience. The goal is to experience every kid, and that's every kid, whether they pay their dues or not. The first step is to get the parents

and kids interested, and the next step is to get the kids experienced in as many things as possible so they will get a transformation in their life, and it will happen. Amber told me of a few instances during her student teaching that made her question what she was doing.

I finally took over the last class during my student teaching experience, which was equine science, and Beth hadn't taught the class the whole semester because she was trying to look classy. I got in there and noticed the kids weren't used to structure or what the lesson would be for the day. I'm not a lesson planner, more lesson delivery, so I told the students that today you all are going to learn, and Beth got so upset; she tried to prevent me from getting my teaching certificate by giving me a bad evaluation.

I had to reiterate; here's the lady that told Amber that she should be a teacher, and then she tries to put a stop to it. This made me think there may be some truth to what Kyle Peters was saying, "Whitey going to get you—don't trust them."

Another experience happened while driving to a contest one day.

There were four teachers in the truck. Another teacher from another school was confiding in all of us; well, let me take that back. She was confiding in the two other teachers because once I had upset her, and from then on I was treated like I wasn't even there. The teacher said she was so nervous she didn't know what to do because she cursed a girl in class. She was scared the student was going to go home and tell her parents, and she was going to get called into the office. I was the only student teacher in the truck, and there's only three other female teachers in the truck including Beth. So Beth said to her, 'Was she black?' and the teacher

said, ‘Yes.’ Beth told her not to worry about it; she gets that at home all the time.

I just sat there and wondered what I was getting myself into. I wondered what they thought of me coming from a dysfunctional family and a single parent home, with no cattle, no sheep, and no goats.

Amber always made it a point when she had student teachers she made them feel at home. She cooked them dinner and would always have a “wrap-up” dinner at her house. Amber let them do whatever they wanted in the class because they have to figure out what’s going to work and what’s not going to work for them.

Amber’s feelings about racism.

Amber says that if we’re talking from a southern perspective, she can live her life because she has had a lot of ups and downs.

If I think historically or strategically, as crazy as this sounds, if 400 years ago oppression made me the strong person I am today, then job well done. I have never thought there weren’t any good white colleagues or counterparts; I did find some along the way. I have always been open, but they have always distanced themselves when everybody from the South says, “Hey! How are you doing?” why can’t you just say hi? I have run into this more than once, and it has made me somewhat stand-offish. I tend to ignore people and give no eye contact. I’ve become the lady with the attitude. No, I don’t have an attitude; it’s just my façade. When nobody sees me, they just walk past me, knowing I’m the only black female ag teacher.

Being the only black female agriculture educator, she finds it hard to believe other agriculture educators do not know who she is. She is ignored even at the Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas (VATAT) convention.

Amber believes you have to take life's experiences and not let them break you, but rather let them make you. She says, "History is history. The Holocaust happened, slavery happened; you can't change that. The leaders of these events in history do not exist today, but the spirit of oppression still exists in a lot of people, it doesn't matter what color you are."

Amber said that was why she got her Masters, too. She felt like being a black female agriculture educator without it would be one more reason for somebody to say, "I'm not going to hire you."

The students.

Amber and I spoke briefly about her students. She said her main goal was to ensure every student is exposed to every aspect of agriculture, regardless of skin color or economic status. She believes agriculture can be a life changing experience.

She finds agriculture educators trying to cater to the students, and their changes in development, like their "faddish things" because we do not want any of our students disappointed in the program. She said she "is going to be as tough as nails. You can thank me later, but I am not going to treat you differently than this kid or that kid."

Amber has had football players in her class that wanted to pass with an 80. Amber makes them earn that 80. She stated,

If a student goes onto a Division 1 or Division 2 school on a scholarship and can't pass, the school may choose to pass you, but in real life if you break a leg or tear

something, you might have a problem. You won't go to the NFL. I don't want my students to feel like I didn't teach them what they needed to know to be successful.

Possible solutions.

Amber had a counselor in high school that cared about her. The counselor would actually counsel, find out what Amber wanted to do; and when Amber did not know what she wanted to do, the counselor suggested an AFNR course. Once in that AFNR course, it was her teachers that gave her opportunities to try different areas in ag. Perhaps it is up to counselors to talk to their students, find out what they are interested in, and give a push in that direction if a student is not sure of their future. Once in the AFNR course, it is up to the educator. Amber says, "I expose every kid to the FFA experience, whether you want it or not, I expose you to it. I'm not going to tell this kid you can do this and another kid you can't do this." Amber says to "get the parents and kids interested," and "get the kids experienced in as many things as possible." More exposure to different experiences will transform a student's life.

Summary Reflections

Amber's road may not have been as rough as Kyle's, but it is not without its potholes. She grew up in a dysfunctional family, but was fortunate enough to have good experiences in her high school agriculture program. Amber has been ignored by peers, as well as betrayed by the woman who told her to be an agriculture educator. Amber has learned to take these experiences to make her a better person and agriculture educator. It is the teachers like her that will make a difference in the agriculture programs.

Amber believed she had no connection to agriculture until she was actually in an AFNR course. Because she had a counselor that listened and suggested that first AFNR course, Amber realized she had always been touched by ag in some way. Unfortunately, not all counselors take the time, or have the time, to spend with each student to really find out what is best for that student. But regardless if the student in an AFNR course wants to be there or not, every kid deserves to be exposed to the whole FFA and agriculture experience. Every student deserves to find out that agriculture is not just about animals. More likely than not, that student will find an area of agriculture that they are interested in and can excel.

CHAPTER VI

Dale Carter

The School

Park Vista High School is the third high school built in the Oleander Independent School District. There are currently six high schools in the Oleander ISD. Park Vista is a suburban school and was built in 2003 north of Austin, TX. Park Vista has a student population of 2,111 including grades 9 thru 12. Student population has shown a slight increase between the school years 2009-2010 and 2014-2015. Park Vista's population changes are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Park Vista High School Student Population – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	2,006	2,111
African American	130 (6.5%)	113 (5.4%)
Hispanic	443 (22.1%)	466 (22.1%)
White	1,317 (65.7%)	1,269 (60.1%)

This data reflects that over the last five years this school has seen:

- a 1.1% decrease in the total population of African American students;
- no increase in the percentage, but an increase of 23 Hispanic students;
- a 5.6% decrease in the number of white students.

Park Vista's student enrollment changes in FFA are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Park Vista High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	214	207
African American	0 (0%)	13 (6.3%)
Hispanic	1 (0.5%)	42 (20.3%)
White	13 (6.1%)	121 (58.5%)

This data reflects that over the last five years this school has seen a:

- 6.3% increase in the number of African American students;
- 19.8 increase in the number of Hispanic students;
- 52.4% increase in the number of white students.

State Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention/Competitions

As stated in the previous chapter, every state has an annual State FFA Convention. All FFA chapters are welcome to attend, but attendance is the decision of each school district. Dale also works for a district that allows him to travel to the Convention. He takes as many students as the district will allow.

During the years 2010 – 2014, Dale's students have been involved in LDEs including Greenhand Creed Speaking, Job Interview, Radio Broadcasting, and Senior

Creed Speaking. For at least two years, they have competed in Ag Advocacy, Senior Skills, and Senior Quiz. During the years 2009 – 2014, CDEs competed in by his students include Livestock Judging and Horse Judging. For at least three years, his teams have tried Poultry Judging and Milk Quality Products Judging. Dale's students have competed in several other LDEs and CDEs over the years, but the ones mentioned are the ones most competed in.

The Interview – Dale Carter

For my third case study, I visited with Dale Cooper near Austin, Texas. Dale began his agriculture science teaching career in 2007 at Lockey High School, a part of Lockey ISD located northwest of Austin, TX. In June of 2009, Dale made a move to Park Vista High School, which is part of the Oleander Independent School District located north of Austin. He is the lead agriculture educator at Park Vista. Dale stated in the interview that he is a first generation college graduate and has a long line of history in the field of agriculture. Even though his family has a long history with agriculture, Mr. Peters was the reason he became an agriculture educator. Mr. Peters is the father of Kyle Peters, the gentleman in which I had the first interview for this dissertation. When Dale was a sophomore in high school, he first saw Mr. Peters at the Houston Livestock Show. Mr. Peters was the first black agriculture educator he had ever seen and was impressed with how he handled his students, keeping them in line.

That's kind of where it all started for me. It's at that point, seeing all that and being raised the way I was raised, and seeing Mr. Peters there keeping these kids in line. That's what I wanted to do right there.

Dale's childhood.

Dale grew up in the hill country between Wimberley and Blanco and all the African Americans in this area were related.

In the hill country there were three predominating families after slavery, after emancipation; the Uptons, Carters, and Robins came together and settled Peyton Colony between Wimberley and Blanco. So they became related to everyone in the hill country. My family was deep in agriculture and that had a big hand in why I wanted to be in ag and why that was what I loved to do. I gained self-esteem from that.

The church, cemetery, and school house where my grandfather grew up all have historical markers because those families were the only black folks in that part of the hill country. I think it's phenomenal what my family had accomplished. There were some renegade Comanche there in the hill country that actually ended up joining that group, so we have Indian blood, too. I would have college professors come up to me and ask, 'Are you from that Carter bunch out of Peyton Colony?' and when I would say, 'Yes,' they would say, 'Wow! Your history is unbelievable!' One of my grandfather's big sayings is, 'When much is given, much is expected;' and I have always taken that personally in everything I do. Most black folks can't trace their history back that far. My family is very fortunate that we could. It's a big part of who I am.

Dale's uncle, Luke Carter, known for his rodeo accomplishments, was a tremendous influence to Dale. They had many experiences together entering rodeos and working in other areas of agriculture. He mentioned a time when he and his uncle Leon

went together to Nebraska to pick up a colt. Dale expressed how his experiences have been very special, but he still never feels “comfortable in my own skin.” Working with his cousin who showed steers, they got together and decided they were going to “do us” and just be the best they can be at what they do.

I hate to say it this way, we weren’t the predominate race; but I don’t know if anyone should be predominate. In an African American family, you’re raised that you’ve got to act different, you’ve got to really set the example, because people’s perspective of an entire race would be based off of what you do. You act like a fool, people perceive everyone else as a fool. That’s a lot of pressure to put on a kid, but I got it. I graduated high school from Round Rock. I went and played football at Southwest Texas because we moved from Blanco to Round Rock when I was pretty young.

I asked Dale if he was involved in FFA in high school.

I came in my second semester of my freshman year. Round Rock had a thriving FFA chapter, it had been around forever, and yet, I was the first black student in that chapter, and the first black officer in that FFA chapter. I think what I valued the most was having the opportunity to show what I could do in a rural setting. We lived outside of town, but we still just lived in a house with an acre where it was enough to do a project or something. It allowed me the opportunity to do what I already did in the summers and the holidays. I went with my grandfather and uncle and worked cows and sheep and whatever we had. Believe it or not we had goats and would rope goats in the pasture and would have to drag them to the doctor or whatever we had to do. I got to realize my passion. And for me, I was a

decent athlete, but it didn't save me. In my opinion what saved me was ag and FFA because I found the thing that I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The thing that you didn't have to pay me to do, but I would do it. If I was going to play sports, you were going to have to pay me, because I didn't want to do sports.

Dale's college years.

Dale reflected on experiences with his agriculture educators and how they did not seem to make a distinction that, "You're a black kid," and thought that maybe it was because his agriculture educators knew his family and all his cousins. So skin color was never an issue with Dale until he went to college. Dale groaned as he thought of his college experiences.

I felt as if everyone could not believe an African American was in college. They thought the only reason I was there was to play football; and it was true, I was there on a football scholarship, but first and foremost I was there for an education. It takes a lot to offend me, but that was a more hurtful experience for me. I felt the other students thought that outside of being an athlete, I was not capable of accomplishing anything. I came from a line of great athletes. Ronald Upton, who played for the Oakland Raiders, is a cousin of mine, was president of the NFL Players Association, and is in the hall of fame. My brothers play football, and I have relatives that are major league baseball players. I'm proud to have numerous pro-athletes in my family, but sports were not my calling.

I chose my major this way . . . what would I do that they would not have to pay me to do. And this was it. Anything in ag I would have done for free. So for me, it's bigger than just the ag industry; it goes back to what my family has

done and our history, it's part of our heritage, so that's a big part of what I wanted to do. Out of 15 grandkids, being the only one to go to college was a big reason why I wanted to graduate. It helped me push through some of the calculus and chemistry and some of the things I wasn't the best at.

Dale told me he was a first generation college graduate.

I asked Dale what he found to be most challenging about his major and the courses he had to complete. He said,

Stats, chemistry, and calculus were the most challenging. I always felt like I was ok in math, but to have to take a calculus class for ag??? A lot of people don't, but at Texas State you get a BS, and you have to take the same chemistry that the pre-med majors had to take. Same calculus and it's, it's... a tough, tough course. I had friends that didn't graduate because they couldn't get by it. It almost deterred me, but I just went ahead and knocked it out. The ag courses were the fun part, the easy part.

Dale's feelings about racism.

Getting into deeper conversation, Dale was thinking on issues with African Americans. He referred to what he felt was Kyle Peters' opinion, and Dale said, "Probably from Kyle's point, I love him to death, one of the best friends in the world, but I told him you can't put that on one specific group."

Relating to Dale, I told him that I have heard in my cohort of seventeen very diverse people, "Don't trust whitey," and how my thoughts were, "Well, why wouldn't you trust me?" I was trying to explain how this was simply different levels of awareness.

Dale understood and went on to tell me,

Here's what I told Kyle . . . You've got to remember, this is not cool. In our community we're almost seen as Uncle Toms. We want something different for ourselves, and for our students, and for our own children, not everybody sees that. Historically speaking agriculture and African Americans don't have a good relationship. But in years past we still engaged in agriculture. When jobs became available in the city they went to San Antonio and Austin. So they left that land because they didn't want that hard work. Just like lots of people that live right here in town, they don't want . . . it's inconvenient to drive 10 miles to go to the grocery store, or go find a gas station . . . for us it's a peace of mind. I like not having somebody right there.

I think, by and large, it's become uncool for those students to associate. A lot of time, we even have a hard time getting into a Suburban with all those white kids because it's not cool. So you battle a couple of different things. On my part I battle a lot of different things because they never seen it . . . most of these kids . . . I can remember walking into here for the first time and just seeing their eyes like 'what the . . . is this?' A big black guy and you have this presence when you walk in the room. And one of my teaching partners said, 'You're not cocky, but you're confident and that scares people.' I told him, 'Well, when you grow up in a rodeo family, if you rodeo you better be confident, or what are you doing in this arena? When Cody Owen and Fred Bower (sp) show up I'm going to give them hell. I may not win, but I'm going to give them hell because they can miss just like I can miss.' So I take that approach to it and then I think a lot of times, people misconstrue it as cocky. And it's not that; I'm confident in my skills. If I gotta

bet on somebody, I'm going to bet on me, because I know what I can do. But ultimately, I think both sides need to own their part. Look at our national president, we never had a black national president, but a couple of years ago this guy came from Chicago. I think a lot of times, our kids have so much thrown at them that they take it for granted. But they are privileged to get out of that low SES underfunded type of school to a school where the windows are nice and they've got central air. I think a lot of it has to be perspective. You've got to look at it from a different perspective. Now, don't get me wrong, racism is bad, it's there. I've had some of these kids in my program since the sixth grade, and some of their parents still don't trust me. I tell them, 'Hey, we need cash . . . we're going to Duncan to buy hogs. I'll bring you a receipt. I can get a deal done better with \$300 cash that I can with a \$500 check.' And they're looking like, hmm . . . even though I tell them I'll bring you a receipt; I don't need to steal.

I asked Dale if he thought that was because of race, and he said, "Oh yes."

The students.

Dale feels being an agriculture educator has been a different experience for him. It gives him the opportunity to be a professional and still do what he loves. His grandfather instilled in him the love of agriculture and the need to influence children.

Dale was thrilled that anyone wants to hear some of the difficulties and struggles, as well as triumphs the black agriculture educator faces. He shared with me how he still feels a little apprehensive as he enters a classroom and feels that the kids are a little concerned that they have a black agriculture educator. And after all these years of teaching, he still feels the parents and students do not trust him. He told me of a couple

experiences he has had with parents that involved purchasing animals for students to raise and show in livestock shows.

Dale had gone to purchase hogs from a well-known and trusted breeder. In order to make a good deal, it is a good idea to have cash in hand. One parent would not send money with Dale. Dale overlooked this and suggested that he would take pictures, let the dad decide on a purchase, and then he could go back the next week to pick up the hog. Even though the student loved the hog Dale chose, his father was not happy, complaining of minor things such as color. The father even told Dale that he did not know what he was doing, and he would buy his own hog.

So he buys a pig from an online auction. The kid brings it and asks me what I think of the hog. I said, 'Man, I don't know . . . it's too much pressure. You all don't trust anything I say . . .' The student is having a hard time with the issue, too, and says 'Well, that's my dad, that's my dad . . .' and I said, 'Well, here's what you need to understand. I know exactly what's going on and I don't like it. But you need to know that I can't be put in that position. I need you to understand that you can trust me or you can't. Now it doesn't mean that you're going to win first, but I'm going to give you the best that I can give you with my skills and knowledge. And we'll go from there.'

Unfortunately, this hog did not do very well at any of the shows they went to. The student realized that Dale did know what he was doing when it came to picking hogs for show. The student also realized his dad was being racist. Dale agreed to help the student buy his next hog.

So this kid issued me his own money, and I bought a hog for him. He won a couple of shows and did really well, and his dad hated the hog from the day I brought it back. I talked to him. Well the hog had a scar from where it had fell on its back maybe when it was a baby, but it was healed up and it's a blemish and not going to affect the way that hog shows. So every time that hog would show, that dad would just throw him in the dirt. Dog him and dog that hog. I finally just talked to him and told him that I knew he didn't like me because of my skin color and that I've heard him say it to other parents. I told him I thought he has a great kid and has some really good things happening for him. He was offended but he couldn't say anything. And from that day on, he hasn't said anything to me. I see him and he just shakes his head and goes on.

Dale spoke of another time when he tried to help a young lady buy a calf to show. Her father never let Dale pick the calf. He decided he could do a better job without Dale's help. It was at a show when Dale had an eye-opening experience.

I had a couple of other kids that were showing calves and I had them in there clipping their calves, getting them ready for the show. This man is standing there and doesn't realize I was there behind him. One of my other students was standing there right beside him and the next thing I here is 'I just hate them nigger calves, I just hate them. I hate anything that's black. Niggers are just ridiculous, I can't stand them.' So I'm just sitting there and thinking, 'Whoa.' I'm kind of taken back a little bit." So as he turns around, he about loses it because he realizes that I heard everything he said, and it's been pretty derogatory, and I just kind of nodded, and he's 'I, I, I, . . .' I told him, 'Its fine, man. It is what it is.'

He was always just overly nice from that point on. It's done, man. The little girl is a sweet girl, sweet kid. It just goes to show you that it is a taught behavior. Kids don't, that's not something they really know to do.

Unfortunately, it is not only the parents with race issues; it has also been other agriculture educators. Dale shared another experience with me.

I remember the first time I ever had to do record books. After working really hard to get the books ready to be checked, I walked in for the check, and needing to make a trip to the restroom, I left my books on a table and went to the restroom. When I came back in, my books had been knocked off the table, and people were just looking at me. I thought everybody would be cool with me there because I came from Blanco, which is where this degree check was held. I just picked up his books and didn't say anything, got the records checked off and left. I was thinking to myself, 'Why would they do this?' because I felt like one of the guys, doing what they do, not against them, but with them, and wanting to be with them because I thought we were all there for the kids; I'm not so sure of that anymore. An ag teacher has to be there for the kids. An ag teacher gives up himself and part of his or her family to do the job. An ag teacher is not just about one or two, they are there for all of the kids. There are just little things like that; it was small, but big.

Possible solutions.

Dale did not have any specific solutions to fix the lack of African American in AFNR courses or teaching positions. Dale was fortunate enough to grow up in an agriculture family. His whole life he had been exposed to and involved in rodeo and

other aspects of agriculture including helping his uncle and grandfather work cows, sheep, or whatever stock they had.

It was not until he first saw Mr. Peters, an African American agriculture educator, at the Houston Livestock Show that he knew what he wanted to do with his life. He was impressed with the way Mr. Peters handled his students, he knew being an agriculture educator was for him.

Perhaps a big part of the solution is having more African American role models in the agriculture educator profession. The only way to do this is by getting more African American students interested in AFNR courses. It is up to all teachers and counselors, white or black, to get this task accomplished.

Summary Reflections

Dale's road was lined with agricultural influences. From a very young age, he was surrounded by agriculture. It is no surprise to me that he was involved in agriculture and FFA all through high school. What I do find surprising is that he was the first black student in his school's chapter. Obviously Dale did not need counseling to push him in that direction, but what about the other black students in his high school? What could have gotten more African American students interested in AFNR classes? Perhaps if AFNR courses and FFA are introduced to students while they are in intermediate or middle school, that would help draw more students in. Students need to be aware that AFNR courses and FFA are not just raising animals; they are teaching students to be leaders in their communities while teaching them skills needed to be successful in any career they choose.

CHAPTER VII

Cross-Case Analysis

Introduction

During a qualitative investigation in a multi-case research interviewing three individual African American agriculture educators, the purpose for this study was to identify factors related to the low participation among African American students in selecting the field of agriculture, specifically in the FFA and agriculture education as a profession. The purpose was to also identify what agriculture educators perceive as ways to increase the interest of African American students in AFNR course in high school, participation in FFA, and agriculture as a profession. Data was compiled from interviews with three African American agriculture educators to perhaps see the problem from their point of view. These interviewees revealed some of the same opinions as well as some differences in opinions. The researcher developed questions to aid in the guidance through the interviews. Permission had already been obtained from the interviewees to use a recorder during the interviews to assist in the accuracy of information obtained from the interviews.

The cross-case analysis first focused on the themes in each individual case study. Second, the cross-case analysis examined narratives for intersections across

and within the themes. The researcher reviewed the original coding and then systematically analyzed for patterns.

Context

This study was composed of three African American agriculture educators, one female and two male, participating in interviews by this researcher. The following three subsections summarize the three interviews, discussing problems each interviewee faces and their ideas of possible solutions. At the conclusion of this chapter, a cross-case analysis identifies commonalities and differences between the three interviewees. I end with a brief summary of this chapter.

Case Analysis

Kyle Peters.

My interview with Kyle was an eye-opening experience for me. I realize how fortunate I am to have grown up the way I did, not having to really prove my worth or abilities because of my skin color. It makes me sad to think that the agriculture world can still be so close-minded when it comes to skin color. Kyle had a long, hard road to travel growing up, and fortunately, he made it.

The school. Kyle is the agriculture educator at Lincoln High School located southwest of Houston, Texas. Lincoln's student body consists of 1,507 students in grades 9 thru 12. The past 5 years has shown a decrease in student population from 2,132.

Research data shows that over the past five years Lincoln has seen a:

- 0.8% decrease in African American students,
- 9.3% increase in Hispanic students, and
- 8.5% decrease in white students.

Data reflecting changes in Lincoln's FFA during the past five years show:

- 3 more members than 5 years ago,
- 1 African American (no African American members 5 years ago),
- 2 new Hispanic students, and
- 6 new white students.

The interview. I knew Kyle's father from years past and was looking forward to visiting with Kyle. Kyle and I met at an FFA State Contest; and at that time Kyle shared some of his thoughts concerning the lack of African American participation in the FFA and the field of agriculture. Kyle was very pleased to assist me with my research and looked forward to sharing his feelings on the issue. Kyle has an impressive list of student accomplishments such as Breed Championships, Grand Champions, and State Qualifying Meats teams.

Kyle's childhood. Kyle is from the rural areas of Southeast Texas, and graduated from Thomas High School. Kyle was a part of the school's FFA program all four years of high school as well as the Junior FFA and 4-H before high school. Kyle enjoyed all the opportunities available through the FFA and 4H, but these opportunities did not always come easily. In 4H, Kyle was spit on by one of his leaders and was never allowed to do anything except work in the back of the concession stand and pack ice. Kyle said that self-motivation was one of the main things he learned being involved in agriculture. He reflected on the main point to remember in AFNR courses is to simply apply yourself.

Kyle's college years. Kyle always knew he would be an agriculture major, with original plans to be a vet. He said he found out the hard way, though, that you have to show up for class in order to pass. He said it took him eight years to grow up and get

back into the program and realize that what he needed all along to do was to be an agriculture educator. Kyle had a few problems with the other students in the agriculture department, mostly, it seemed, because he didn't dress the way they thought an agriculture student was expected to dress. Kyle had been in agriculture all his life, so he knew the clothes didn't make the agriculture educator.

Kyle's feelings about racism. Kyle did not want to talk about racism. He simply stated that it does exist, but it is not his issue. Kyle feels that people see him and immediately assume that he knows nothing. He said that Amber will say the same thing. Kyle feels blacks have to walk a different walk than others. Martin and Kitchel, (2015) reported that experiences such as this might encourage, or discourage, African American students to feel less challenged to reach the highest capability. Kyle said that he does not call it racism, but that they just get treated different. Kyle said his dad was angry and hated white people and still does, and does not trust anyone. Kyle said that everyone is not that way, though. Kyle's wife is white, so he does not see color. He has children; he says they are not black or white. Kyle feels he has to walk an extra step because of his color and that is what makes him angry, because no one is better black or white.

The students. Kyle had a student that did not want to participate. Kyle asked the student why he was in the class if he did not want to participate, and this caused Kyle to remember back thinking of the people who caused him to have the desire to become an agriculture educator. He acknowledged that everyone that has been around him has helped him to want to be an agriculture educator. But there is that student that is placed in AFNR courses in an effort to help him or her see the world in a different perspective. How far can an agriculture educator go, however, with that student that has blocked out

the world? How does an agriculture educator get that student to look at the world around them? Kyle feels television has a large part to do with problems with students. On television, students see black people as comedians or athletes. And his view on the FFA issue is that the FFA prefers to cater to people with money, not the poor people.

Possible solutions. Kyle made the statement that it is not the black agriculture educators that need to solve this problem, but maybe it should fall on the shoulders of the white teachers. I totally agree with this statement. With the majority of educators and students being white, how can it not be their responsibility? Are the white agriculture educators not the ones promoting AFNR and the FFA program to potential students? It is up to all agriculture educators and their school districts to promote the program to all students, no matter what color the students may be.

Amber Cooper

The school. Amber is the agriculture educator at Davidson High School. Davidson opened its doors in 2012. Davidson is located in Houston, Texas, and is part of the Allbright Independent School District in Hawk County. Davidson High School has grown since the time it began in 2012 from 1,672 to 2,542 in 2015. The FFA chapter at Davidson has grown from 18 African Americans, to 33; from 25 Hispanics to 39; from not having any whites to having 1 white.

The interview. Amber was eager to begin the interview. Amber began teaching in 2005 at Mayton High School in Fossil Ridge ISD, southwest of Houston. She moved a year later with her husband to Colorado and taught one year there at Lawson High School, and then moved back to Houston to the Allbright School District. Amber has

several accomplishments to be proud of, one of which is being the first black woman agriculture educator in Texas.

Amber's childhood. Amber began talking about her childhood and family history. She grew up in Houston, Texas, in the Third Ward right next to downtown; she had no experience in agriculture while growing up, except to put a dry bean into a pot of dirt and set it by the window and watch it grow. She also helped her mother in the florist shop, arranging flowers. She thought she might like to be a police officer when she grew up, but did not care for the law classes. The law classes just did not keep her interest. Amber was not a good student, and in the counselor's office she was a little surprised that the counselor actually talked with her. The counselor asked her to take an agriculture class, and she agreed. Amber purchased a lamb for a project in her AFNR course, but knew nothing about lambs, and once again made no connection with the project or the AFNR course; however, that AFNR course, along with other experiences seemed to continually connect her with agriculture. Working with her mother in the flower shop made Amber feel she had been connected with agriculture all her life. In high school she was the only African American in her FFA chapter.

Amber's college years. Amber did not want to go to Prairie View for some reason. She did not want to go where it seemed blacks always go, and she had a cousin there that was going to Prairie View. She wanted to go to Blinn with a friend of hers and be able to share a dorm. There was no more housing available, so Amber ended up going to Prairie View. She did feel she was getting more agriculture experience at Prairie View than others got at other universities.

Amber did her student teaching at Fossil Ridge ISD under Beth Barker. Amber met Beth while working for the USDA. Beth was the person who challenged Amber to become the first African American female agriculture educator in the state of Texas. Amber went through the program at Sam Houston State University and when she got ready to pick her block she wanted to student teach under Beth Barker. However, there was some racism on the block with separations, and the students in the class had no respect for her. That was when she said her eyes had been opened to the fact that she was different.

Amber is determined to expose every student to FFA whether they want it or not. She just feels it is that important to a student's education. Beth, however, got very upset with Amber regarding a lesson she had planned for the students, and Beth tried to prevent Amber from getting her teaching certificate. This might help one to understand why African Americans sometimes say to not trust whitey.

With regards to another moment with Beth, while traveling to attend a meeting, another teacher was confiding in Beth about cursing a student. The teacher was worried about what the student would do, and Beth asked the teacher if the student was black; when told that the student was black, Beth told her not to worry, because they hear that at home all the time.

Amber's feelings about racism. Amber feels you have to take life's experiences and history and not let that break you down, rather it should help build you up. Even though it may sound crazy, she is thankful that oppression possibly has something to do with her being the strong black woman she is today. She understands that history is what it is and cannot be changed, but she does not let that keep her down.

Amber feels she has to work even harder to prove herself and prove that she is more than capable of doing her job as an agriculture educator. She felt it necessary to earn her Master's Degree in Agricultural Education because she is black and female. She did not want these to be the reasons someone would not hire her.

The students. Amber was not raised in an agricultural environment. She initially thought she would be a police officer or in law enforcement somehow. It was a high school counselor that encouraged her to try an AFNR course, and from that point on she knew agriculture would be a major part of her life. Amber believes every student has the right to participate in every aspect of AFNR courses, no matter what. She has witnessed agriculture educators favor some students over others because of economic status or because one student may be smarter than another. It is her goal to expose every student in AFNR courses to the FFA and the agriculture life whether they want it or not. Once the students are interested, the next thing is to get parents interested, then Amber believes "they will get a transformation in their life by taking ag."

Possible solutions. Amber has learned these experiences make her a better person and agriculture educator. It is the teachers like her that will make a difference in the agriculture programs. Amber made some of the same statements as Kyle regarding the solution possible falling on the white agriculture educator. However, she has perhaps been more apt to trust whites than apprehensive. Amber led me to believe that she feels all agriculture educators, along with that school district, should strive to promote the AFNR classes and the FFA program to all students regardless of color. With more agriculture educators like Amber, there would perhaps be more role model African American agriculture educators.

Dale Carter.

The school. Dale began teaching agriculture in 2007 near Austin, Texas, at Lockey High School. In 2009 he moved to Park Vista High School in the Oleander Independent School District north of Austin. Dale is the lead agricultural educator at Park Vista. Park Vista is the third high school built in the Oleander ISD and was built in 2003. This school district currently has six high schools in the district. Park Vista has a decrease in African American students from 2009 with 130, to only 113 African American students in 2015, with an increase of Hispanic students from 443 in 2009 to 466 in 2015, and a decrease of white students from 1,317 in 2009 to 1,269 in 2015.

The interview. My third interview was with Dale near Austin. Dale is a first generation college graduate with a long line of history in agriculture; however, he feels Mr. Peters was the reason he became an agriculture educator. Mr. Peters is the father of Kyle Peters with whom I had my first interview for this dissertation. Mr. Peters was the first black agriculture educator Dale had ever seen, and was so impressed with how Mr. Peters handled himself with the students. Dale said that was where it all started for him.

Dale's childhood. Dale grew up in the hill country between Wimberley and Blanco and all the African Americans in the area were related. There were three families in the area: the Uptons, the Carters, and the Robins and they settled the Peyton Colony. Dale said that this was where he gained his self-esteem. He feels it is very special what his family has done there. Most blacks cannot trace their family history that far back, so that is very important.

Dale's uncle, Luke Carter, a well-known rodeo performer with many accomplishments has been a tremendous influence to Dale. They had many rodeo

experiences together and worked together in other areas of agriculture. Dale related in the interview his experiences growing up and being told you have to act different and set the example, because perspectives of an entire race would be based on what you do. That was a lot of pressure for a kid.

Round Rock had a very good FFA chapter that had been around forever, but Dale was the first black student and the first black officer in that chapter. He felt that agriculture was the saving power for him.

Dale's college years. Dale felt his agriculture educators never made a distinction between white students and black students. Skin color was never an issue with Dale until he went to college. All white students felt Dale was in college to play football only. Dale was there on a football scholarship, but football was not what he wanted to do the rest of his life. He was there to get an agriculture degree and become an agriculture educator. Dale mentioned some of his relatives who were professional athletes, but Dale said that was not his calling.

Dale's teaching experiences. Dale has loved being an agriculture educator. He feels it gives him the opportunity to be a professional and still do what he loves. Dale was thrilled that anyone wanted to hear some of the difficulties, as well as accomplishments the black agriculture educator faces. Dale feels that after all these years of teaching white people still do not trust him. That is Dale's largest hurt and problem. If students and parents do not trust their teacher, teaching a child becomes much harder.

Dale's feelings about racism. Dale feels you cannot put that issue on one particular group. He said he told Kyle this thing is not cool. Dale said that in their community they are almost seen as Uncle Toms. He said that when jobs became

available in the big cities, blacks moved to the cities for the easier jobs, because agriculture reflected back to the slave days and hard work, so they left the land.

Dale still has an awkward feeling about how students might feel when this big black guy walks into their classroom, and whether he is going to be thought of as being cocky. Dale does not feel he is cocky, but simply feels confident in what he is doing. Dale feels racism is bad, and it is there, but you have to work with it. He feels the lack of trust from the students and parents is because of race.

The students. In his teaching career, Dale feels the distrust from his students and their parents because of his skin color. He still gets looks from students when they see “a big black guy” is teaching their class. However, Dale still feels, as Jones et al. (1998) reported, that when schools have more African American agriculture educators, the AFNR and FFA programs will draw more African American students to enroll in the agriculture programs. Dale reflected on a couple of issues with students regarding the lack of trust when it was difficult to purchase livestock for students because of parents’ lack of trust. Dale related to me that an agriculture educator is not just for one or two, but for all the kids. Dale said these are small things, but they are big things.

Possible solutions. Dale’s road was smooth until he arrived at college. It is from that point on that he has had to deal with race issues. In college, it was everyone thinking he was only in college to play football. Dale does not deny the existence of racism, but he believes both sides need to own their part. As Jones et al. (1998), indicated a relationship between African American students and the need for an African American role model creates a very positive relationship.

Cross-Case Analysis

Table 7 shows Lincoln High School's student population change between the school years 2009 - 2010 and 2014 - 2015.

Table 7

Lincoln High School Student Population – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	2,132	1,507
African American	551 (25.8%)	377 (25.0%)
Hispanic	885 (41.5%)	765 (50.8%)
White	551 (25.8%)	261 (17.3%)

Table 8 shows Lincoln High School's student FFA enrollment between the years 2009 – 2010 and 2014 – 2015.

Table 8

Lincoln High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	19	22
African American	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Hispanic	1 (5%)	3 (14%)
White	8 (42%)	14 (64%)

The data from tables 7 and 8 show the white population has decreased, yet white FFA enrollment has increased and is over three times greater than African American and Hispanic combined.

Table 9 shows Davidson High School's student population change between the school years 2012 - 2013 and 2014 - 2015.

Table 9

Davidson High School Student Population – 2012-2013 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2012-2013	2014-2015
Total	1,672	2,542
African American	631 (37.7%)	923 (36.3%)
Hispanic	946 (56.6%)	1,465 (57.6%)
White	20 (25.8%)	24 (0.9%)

Table 10 shows Davidson High School's student FFA enrollment between the years 2012 - 2013 and 2014 – 2015.

Table 10

Davidson High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2012-2013 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2012-2013	2014-2015
Total	43	77
African American	18(41.9%)	33 (42.9%)
Hispanic	25 (58.1%)	39 (50.6%)
White	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)

The data from tables 9 and 10 show School population is predominantly Hispanic with African American population close behind.

Table 11 shows Park Vista High School's student population change between the school years 2009 - 2010 and 2014 - 2015.

Table 11

Park Vista High School Student Population – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

Student Populations	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	2,006	2,111
African American	130 (6.5%)	113 (5.4%)
Hispanic	443 (22.1%)	466 (22.1%)
White	1,317 (65.7%)	1,269 (60.1%)

Table 12 shows Park Vista High School's student FFA enrollment between the years 2009 – 2010 and 2014 – 2015.

Table 12

Park Vista High School FFA Student Enrollment – 2009-2010 – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	2009-2010	2014-2015
Total	214	207
African American	0 (0%)	13 (6.3%)
Hispanic	1 (0.5%)	42 (20.3%)
White	13 (6.1%)	121 (58.5%)

Data from tables 11 and 12 show school population is predominantly white with student population and FFA enrollment percentages similar.

Table 13 shows a comparison of student populations between Lincoln, Davidson, and Park Vista High Schools for the school year 2014-2015.

Table 13

Lincoln, Davidson, and Park Vista High School Student Populations – 2014-2015

Student Population	Lincoln	Davidson	Park Vista
Total	1507	2542	2111
African American	377 (25%)	923 (36.3%)	113 (5.4%)
Hispanic	765 (50.8%)	1465 (57.6%)	466 (22.1%)
White	261 (17.3%)	24 (0.9%)	1269 (60.1%)

Table 14 shows a comparison of FFA enrollment between Lincoln, Davidson, and Park Vista High Schools for the school year 2014-2015.

Table 14

Lincoln, Davidson, and Park Vista High School FFA Enrollment – 2014-2015

FFA Enrollment	Lincoln	Davidson	Park Vista
Total	22 (1.5%)	77 (3%)	207 (9.8%)
African American	1 (5%)	33 (42.9%)	13 (6.3%)
Hispanic	3 (14%)	39 (50.6%)	42 (20.3%)
White	14 (64%)	1 (1.3%)	121 (58.5%)

Having interviewed three individual African American agriculture educators, a few of the views of each teacher seemed very similar, with very similar feelings regarding the issue of the lack of African American agriculture educators. There were some differences, as well. During each interview each interviewee showed a tremendous love for their chosen field, and is deeply committed to teaching agriculture. Each of the interviewees spoke candidly about the issue of needing more African American agriculture educators.

Kyle and Dale agree that racism exists, and there is a problem, but they have different opinions on where to lay blame. Kyle thinks the white agriculture educators are the ones who need to fix the problem, whereas Dale thinks both sides need to “own their part.”

Both Kyle and Dale have dealt with stereotypical thinking from others. They both agree that black people are mostly portrayed as comedians, athletes, or criminals. Whent (1994) reported that some teachers might perhaps unconsciously have expectations of students being based on gender, social status, ethnicity, or appearance rather than their ability. It is this kind of portrayal that keeps people, black and white, in the mindset that African Americans are not good for too much more than sports. Kyle lays this blame on television.

Will there ever be a solution for the issue of the lack of African Americans in FFA? Hopefully there will be. It will take action from every side involved; black, white, teachers, administration, students, and parents. All students from every race need to be exposed to agriculture in some way. Agriculture ensures the existence of our world, from

food to clothing to career training. This is not just a white issue or a black issue, it is a world issue.

Amber feels she has come to where she is in life because of the good and the bad, regardless of what the good or bad might have been. She feels good about who she is and where she came from and what her future might hold. Amber has quite a different outlook on life than Kyle or Derick, and what life has done for her; and she is determined to make sure her students learn to appreciate agriculture, and the benefits of agriculture.

Summary

Chapter VII is a presentation of the findings based on data obtained through interviews with three African American agriculture educators. Information and feelings expressed in these interviews prove there is still a problem regarding the “black and white” issue. Although many hurdles have been cleared, there are still more to go. This seems to be a common feeling between the interviewees. The problem will not be fixed overnight, nor is there only one solution. Perhaps part of the problem is as Talbert and Larke Jr. (1995) stated in their study that minority students have a more negative perception of agriculture. Change will only occur when both sides can come together, take ownership of their part, and then try to work together to find some answers.

Does the negative attitude begin before the decision to enroll in AFNR courses? Perhaps the negative attitude exists before the student walks into the school. If this is the case, does the school need to be more encouraging to minority students? Agriculture does need to be offered to minority students in an effort to show the many benefits of an agriculture education, specifically when the Admission Office is attempting to “dump” a

student into the AFNR course for lack of knowing where to put them (Talbert & Lake Jr., 1995).

CHAPTER VIII

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations drawn from the research and study of the lack of African American agriculture educators, and the lack of African American students in AFNR courses and FFA. The purpose for this study was to identify factors related to the low participation among African American students in selecting the field of agriculture, specifically in the FFA and agriculture education as a profession. The purpose was to also identify what agriculture educators perceive as ways to increase the interest of African American students in AFNR course in high school, participation in FFA, and agriculture as a profession. Having experienced the lack of African American students participating in AFNR courses and FFA, the lack of African American agriculture educators also became noticeable and of concern. More interest in agriculture by the African American student is shown when there is an African American agriculture educator for a role model. Information was gathered by research developed from others who have also had concern for the issue, and interviews were conducted with three African American agriculture educators, one female and two males.

Summary of the Study

The qualitative case study design used two forms of data collection to facilitate the study. These included past case studies and interviews with three African American agriculture educators. The interviews allowed me to question three individual African American agriculture educators in their own individual selected environment allowing for commended candid responses to the questions. Each of the three African American agriculture educators demonstrated their appreciation in the active concern for the issue. The face-to-face interviews gave the impression that the teachers were at ease and permitted open and honest discussion. This common atmosphere allowed me to ask questions and acquire information pertinent to this study. These three case approaches in this study were substantial in providing information regarding the lack of African American agriculture educators and the need for more African American participation in the field of agriculture (Martin & Kitchel, 2015). I have personally witnessed the lack of African American students and educators at various FFA events. Jones et al. (1998) stated that “Schools having an African American teacher had higher African American enrollment” (p. 6).

As LaVergne et al. (2011) reported, there is a need for more information on the subject of agricultural education and the impact this lack of information has on African-American student’s perceptions of agricultural education. Agricultural educators might revisit recruitment efforts and cultivate approaches to provide a more positive awareness of agricultural education (LaVergne et al., 2011). It has also been interesting to note that schools with a larger population of African American students do not encourage their administration to provide incentives for agricultural technology classes and programs

(Westbrook & Alston, 2007). In some cases, factors with the students regarding issues at home creating a lack of support may also have contrary effects on the students, as noted by this researcher and the three African American agriculture educators who were interviewed.

Conclusions

This study confirms and adds to the fact that there is cause for concern for the lack of African American students and teachers in the field of agriculture. Information and feelings expressed in these interviews prove there is still a problem regarding the “black and white” issue. Although many hurdles have been cleared, there are still more to go. This seems to be a common feeling between the interviewees. The problem will not be fixed overnight, nor is there only one solution. Perhaps part of the problem is as Talbert and Larke Jr. (1995) stated in their study that minority students have a more negative perception of agriculture. Change will only occur when both sides can come together, take ownership of their part, and then try to work together to find some answers.

Does the negative attitude begin before the decision to enroll in AFNR courses? Perhaps the negative attitude exists before the student walks into the school. If this is the case, does the school need to be more encouraging to minority students? Agriculture does need to be offered to minority students in an effort to show the many benefits of an agriculture education, specifically when the Admission Office is attempting to “dump” a student into the AFNR course for lack of knowing where to put them (Talbert & Lake Jr., 1995).

Having schools with such diversity, administrators, counselors and teachers need to address the reasons for such a lack of diversity in the agriculture programs. These

reasons include, but are not limited to, little or no recruitment from the junior high and middle schools, the assumption that students must have an animal to participate in agriculture, and as Kyle Peters stated in his interview, white teachers “not hauling African American students to contests . . . because they are not promoting ag to those students.”

On the basis of the effects obtained through examination of notes, interviews and the cross-case analysis of the three case studies, conclusions have been drawn with respect to any school offering AFNR courses and the administrations of these schools. The field of agriculture is not reaching the diverse student’s understanding for the necessity of this education and training (Jaygresh, 2012). While students are placed in AFNR courses for lack of any other class to put them in, agriculture is not being discussed with the student explaining the reasoning for placing them in an AFNR course; therefore, creating a resentment toward the school and the school’s administration. LaVergne et al. (2011) suggested that recruitment efforts should work with school guidance counselors, principals, and other teachers to ensure AFNR courses are being promoted in a desirable manner offered to all students, thereby creating a better understanding for the students and allowing them to have an anticipated approach to agriculture.

Implications

The number of African American students decreases with little concern in the field of agriculture. Support staff, as well as teachers and administrators, need to be made aware of the need for counseling with these students and expressing the need for agriculture education. Students should be encouraged to develop a desire regarding the

need for education in the field of agriculture. Students need to see a positive attitude from school administration, school teachers, and parents regarding the field of agricultural technology (Jones & Larke Jr., 2003). Perhaps students need to become more open-minded and realize occasions are being provided that allow them to get involved in agricultural activities.

The outcomes of this study offer researchers to develop and build additional research based upon what has been discovered. Caring relationships with students is essential to the success of the students. An implication ascertained from this study is the need for concern within the schools to counsel with students emphasizing the need for agriculture education. Another implication suggests that teachers and administrators get to know students with one-on-one communication and understanding, giving students more self-assurance and leadership development. According to Jones et al. (1998), “. . . teachers who could relate well to all students, and were enthusiastic about their programs, had the highest number of African American students in their courses” (p. 19). The interpretations of the three interviewee participants of this study provided many thoughts that could be used by instructors and leadership teams to develop the African American students’ interest in agriculture. It would be interesting to demonstrate results of various students who entered the agriculture classroom thinking it would be an easy grade, and to see them now, in the community, working in the field of agriculture. Some have gone on to college to become agriculture educators, some working on ranches, others working in meat labs and butcher shops, being successful in all areas.

Suggestions have been made that African American students and other diverse students enroll in classes with a teacher of their same race; however, studies show diverse

students seldom check on the race of a teacher before enrolling in a class. Therefore, the race of the teacher is not related to whether or not students enroll in agriculture classes (Jones et al., 1998). I would like to also reiterate here that minorities have possibly received misleading information regarding the likelihood of limited job opportunities in the field of agriculture. “Teachers wishing to enroll more African American students in agricultural science classes need to convince such students of the agricultural sciences’ positive future offered them, including challenging educational experiences and rewarding careers” (Jones et al., 1998, p.47).

Recommendations

During the course of the study, this researcher discovered the need for some additional research for the benefit of educators to gain additional knowledge to assist in future interest of the African American agriculture educator. The first recommendation necessary for entities in view of research of actual effective methods of counseling students would help in reading and learning their cultures, their interests, their neighborhoods, their historical information, spiritual customs, and how they learn. Before you can start teaching any student, it is imperative to have background information. Educators need to understand students’ home lives, social lives, and knowledgeable progress. A teacher or any administrative person should be supportive of the students and help them learn to try. Communicating with students, parents, and staff is a must. Studies show that awareness of relationships between teachers and students could meaningfully impact students’ achievements.

The second recommendation is to advance research on different professional opportunities in the field of agriculture and operational classroom education for students

in their first experiences with agriculture. Some African American students have had some agricultural background, such as Kyle, one of my African American agriculture educator interviewees, whose father was an agriculture educator, and Dale had worked with animals in the rodeos. Students like Kyle will perhaps be more ready and excited about studying agriculture. However, other students who have never been close to an animal of any sort, nor watched a seed grow into a plant, might be more reluctant to study agriculture. This might be an issue to consider and analyze; and perhaps deserves further study.

The third recommendation is to research programs that appeal to the African American student and consider how involvement in programs appealing to them can help sway attitudes toward agriculture. Involvement in related programs perhaps will provide students with a sense of being a part of the agriculture program, and will perhaps also help them to build more positive relationships with students and the program. Positive relationships between teachers and children play key roles in building student self-esteem.

Further research and studies are not the only recommendations of this researcher. Current and future agriculture educators, black or white, need to develop relationships with all students starting at an early age. Agriculture educators and counselors from high schools need to find and take the time to educate junior high and middle school aged students about the many different programs and opportunities agriculture has to offer. Parents need to be involved as this takes place, so the parents can also encourage their children to become involved in agriculture.

As for FFA, they should also be more active in helping agriculture educators and counselors educate and encourage younger students. State officers should not only visit high schools, but junior high and middle schools, too. The State officers need to plant the seed of agriculture early in order to reap a bountiful harvest of future agriculture students and educators.

Final Reflections

Being an educator who grew up in a weekend agricultural setting gave me the desire to be in the field of agriculture; and I had a very special agriculture teacher, Mr. Brown, while taking agriculture courses at Weatherford College. Mr. Brown helped me to find a direction in my life, and that direction was to become an agriculture educator. Now, as I look around and see the need for more African American agriculture educators, I have a desire to be “Mr. Brown” to them. This desire caused me to feel obliged to research the issue and to encourage more African American students to aspire to playing vital roles in the FFA chapter, such as FFA president or other officers.

The purpose for this study was to identify factors related to the low participation among African American students in selecting the field of agriculture, specifically in the FFA and agriculture education as a profession. The purpose was to also identify what agriculture educators perceive as ways to increase the interest of African American students in AFNR course in high school, participation in FFA, and agriculture as a profession. The past several years has shown an increase in interest, but the need for more African American agriculture educators is still significantly needed, as well as the need for more African American students taking part in AFNR classes. Focus seems to

have remained, but the development of the focus to provide the need has not seemingly changed much.

In reflecting over the study and changes being made since the beginning of my study, I am pleased with the outcome and the levels of participation during my research. As for the results, I desire to see the additional interest of African Americans in the field of agriculture. Perhaps other scholar practitioners will read this qualitative case study and expand upon my discoveries, and hopefully in the near future we will have a more equally developed team of agricultural educators. I hope, of course, this qualitative case study will serve as a map guiding others to new and better concepts by which to learn. The African American student needs more adults – parents, teachers, administrators, and community relations – who provide a positive attitude regarding the field of agriculture, and express the need for more African Americans in the field of agriculture (Harris, 2015; Jones & Bowen, 1998; Wakefield & Talbert, 2001).

Moving forward, I would like to expand upon this study by working with instructional leaders who develop African American leaders. The success of students in the field of agriculture is essential to America. I would like assurance that the concern for the African American student is at the vanguard of those developing the future of agriculture. The number of African American students has increased in some areas more than others in the past few years and we should not drop the torch in leading African American students to a realization of the need for their participation in the field of agriculture. As history repeats itself, we can feel assured of the success of this development, but time is an important issue in the development. More and more African

American students grow up each year without the knowledge of and/or realizing the need for agriculture.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Participant's Communication

Date

Participant Name
XXXX Independent School District
City, Texas

Dear XXXX,

My name is John Denson, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. I am conducting a research study towards completing my dissertation for a doctoral degree at Stephen F. Austin State University. The topic of my dissertation is diversity within the Texas agricultural education, and in particular I am interested in the absence of student diversity. My interest in this topic stems from witnessing a notable absence of African American students in agricultural education and in teaching positions in schools. I hope to use some of the knowledge gained from the study to inform student and faculty decisions concerning agricultural education.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in the study. Specifically, your participation will involve a series of interviews at a place, date, and time convenient to your schedule. The interviews are expected to last 30-60 minutes.

All interview and observation data collected will be held in strict confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school and participants will be identified with a special code, respectively, in the final documentation of the study. Pseudonyms will be used for the names of school sites and participants in the study. Transcripts of the interviews will be available in order for participants to confirm the information provided.

If you have any questions or require clarifications, please contact me at phone number or Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, chairperson of the dissertation committee, at 936.468.1756.

Thank you for your assistance.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

Sincerely,

John D. Denson
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Educational Leadership
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APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Date:

Dear Participant,

My name is John Denson. I am conducting a research study towards completing my dissertation for a doctoral degree at Stephen F. Austin State University. The topic of my dissertation is diversity within the Texas agricultural education, and in particular I am interested in the absence of student diversity. My interest in this topic stems from witnessing a notable absence of African American students in agricultural education and in teaching positions in schools. I hope to use some of the knowledge gained from the study to inform student and faculty decisions concerning agricultural education.

I am asking for voluntary participation in a series of 3-4 interviews. The interviews will address perceived factors that contributed to your participation in Future Farmers of America and agricultural education. The entire process will be kept confidential and no personal information will be disclosed at any time during or after the study. Since the study will use pseudonyms, your name will not be associated with the study. Furthermore, all information collected from this study will be kept locked in my house in a secured cabinet and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

If at any time during the study, you decide to discontinue your participation, you may do so without difficulties. If you have any questions, I would be willing to explain the study further and/or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Patrick Jenlink at 936.468.1756. Thank you for the time vested in the interview and the survey.

If you are interested in the results of the study, I will provide you a copy of the completed report.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

By signing my name, I am stating that I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

John D. Denson

Patrick M. Jenlink, Ed. D.

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APPENDIX C

African American Agriculture Educators

Interview Questionnaire/Protocol

Good Morning/Good Afternoon. Thank you for your participation in this study. During this process I am going ask you specific questions related to the study. Please understand that all information gathered in the data collection stages of the study will be kept strictly confidential and that pseudonyms will be used for all participants in the study. In addition, all information collected in this study will be kept in a locked cabinet that the researcher alone will have access to during the study. If at anytime during the interview process or progress in the study you feel uncomfortable by any of the questions, please let me know and we will skip to the next questions on the questionnaire.

Level One – Initial Contact Information, Introductory, and Discussion Topics

The initial contact information will provide an orientation to the study and an opportunity for the potential participant to ask preliminary questions concerning the study.

1. Personal Introductions
2. Overview of the study
3. Purpose and nature of the study
4. Goals and objectives of the study
5. Selection Criteria
6. Confidentiality procedures
7. Inform Consent
8. Member checks
9. Opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time
10. Estimated timeframe from study
11. Sharing findings
12. Scheduling interview sites and time

Level Two – Interview Questions

This level of interview questions will provide the initial data source from which the researcher, after transcription and data analysis, will formulate a second level of research questions. As well, the data from this level of interview will provide the first level of narratives used in writing the narrative non-fiction stories.

1. As we beginning the interview process, please describe where you are from? Is it a rural, suburban, or urban city?
2. Where did you grow up, attend and graduate from school?
3. Did your school have an FFA program and how many years did you participate?
4. What did you value most about the program?
5. What guided you to choose your major in college?
6. What do you find most challenging about your major and the courses you completed?

Level Three – Interview Questions

This level of interview questions will be generated during the first initial interview. The data from the first three levels of the interview will provide the next level narrative data necessary to further developing the narrative non-fiction stories. As required, a fourth level of interview questions will follow to ensure data saturation.

Level Four – Interview Questions

This level of interview questions will be generated from the transcription and analysis of the prior level of interview questions. The data from this level of interview, once the interviews are transcribed and the data is analyzed, will provide the next level narrative data necessary to further developing the narrative non-fiction stories. The intent of this level of questions is to ensure data saturation.

VITA

John D. Denson graduated from Robert E. Lee High School, Tyler, Texas, in 1988. He graduated from Weatherford College in 1993 with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Farm and Ranch Management. In 2005 while working for Yellow Transportation as the Manager of Equipment Services, he earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Services and Development with a minor in Animal Science at Tarleton State University. He studied at Stephen F. Austin State University to earn a Master of Education degree in 2011; he then began teaching Science at Damon Independent School District in Damon, Texas. After his first year at Damon, he chartered Damon's first ever Future Farmers of America chapter. In the fall of 2013, he became the Agriculture teacher at Longview Independent School District and oversaw design and construction of their advanced Meat Laboratory. He was accepted into the 2013 Doctoral Cohort at Stephen F. Austin State University, where he completed a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership while teaching agriculture at Longview ISD.

Permanent Address: 15208 FM 852, Gilmer, Texas 75644

Style manual designation: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*

Typist: John D. Denson