

...hooked!!

My Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Jerry Burchett, stands at the front of the classroom taking roll. The school year is only a few weeks old but we have already settled into a routine. He finishes roll call and starts the announcements for the day; but this is sixth period and we've had all we can stand, so all we hear is blah, blah, blah; until he says, "the Otero County Fair will be held in September next fall, which means it's time to start thinking about buying show steers. We'll wait a few months to buy show pigs and show lambs". Everyone is listening. He continues, "Remember that you will not be allowed to purchase any show animals or register for the County Fair until you turn in a budget complete with expenses and income."

With that he closes the attendance book, walks slowly to his desk, puts the roll book down and picks up a folder with today's lesson plan, and then walks slowly back to the podium in the center of the room and opens the folder. The whole thing takes about 20 seconds, long enough for this class full of freshman to *take the bait*. He looks up just in time to see a hand go up in the back of the room, "hey Mr. Burchett what is a budget". Mr. Burchett pauses for a second, smiles and says, "Well that's not what I had planned to talk about today", *he skillfully takes the slack out of the line*, "but if you really want to talk about budgets I guess we'll talk about budgets", *the line draws tight and the hook is set*. And so we, a group of freshman boys, happily and attentively learn everything there is to know about budgets for the next 3 days.

What just happened? I saw him do it a hundred times over the next three years but it was ten years later, with my own classroom full of freshman, before I realized what he was doing. In a simple exercise he created an environment in the classroom where: 1) we selected the topic to be discussed that day; 2) we discovered the information ourselves based on questions and problem solving in a laboratory called real life; and 3) we were motivated not by the "lesson objective" but by the multitude of opportunities that this knowledge opened up for us; all orchestrated by a master teacher.

Classroom: Most teachers can deliver the "what to". They know how to talk about "what to do" or "what to know" or "why to know". That's your standard lecture; blah, blah, blah. This method provides a lot of information but very little engagement. For the student there is little connection with the real world or more important their world.

Laboratory/SAE: The really good teacher can deliver the "what to" along with a good dose of "how to", applying the information presented in the classroom to a laboratory setting; helping each student make connections that were not present in the classroom. I heard a teacher describe this process as "learning with your hands". This process is valuable for all students but is most valuable for kinesthetic learners or those students who learn best by physical activity rather than by listening or watching. It makes what you are learning real.

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FFA (CTSO): But the master teacher initiates and encourages the “want to”, the desire to learn. Their students are motivated not by the “lesson objective” but are instead motivated by the opportunity that the knowledge and skill opens up for them. Whether the opportunity is a valuable skill that can be used to earn money, recognition through the FFA, an earned reward, personal satisfaction, or just being better than your teacher; the opportunity is what drives the students to learn more and to do more.

Classroom, laboratory, Supervised Agricultural Experience Program (SAEP), and FFA; are all components of the program important? Only if you want to hook your student’s attention before you try to teach.