

Philosophy and Purposes for a Teacher Education
Program in a Land Grant University

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The profession of agricultural education has over the years stated in different forms a philosophy to guide the actions and thoughts of individuals and educational units. Sometimes this philosophy appeared as "We believe . . ." statements, sometimes as articles in journals which discussed agricultural education's philosophy in general and/or specific terms, sometimes as papers and presentations at regional and national meetings, and sometimes between colleagues over cups of coffee.

The importance of discussing, developing, and following a philosophy is evident when a review of the literature in agricultural education is conducted. Phipps (1980) presented a philosophy for vocational education in agriculture by identifying nine areas that the profession should emphasize in offering the program at the local level. A more unified philosophy for vocational agriculture was adopted in 1975 by the Agricultural Education Division, AVA, when it approved *The Philosophy of Vocational Agricultural Education*. Again, this philosophy provided direction for vocational agriculture programs at the local level. Other colleagues who have raised questions or discussed the philosophy of vocational agriculture as it applies to local programs have been Love (1978), Anderson (1977), Cross (1981), Camp (1982), and Sutphin and Newcomb (1982). It becomes obvious that if philosophy is important to developing a sound educational program then it is without question that agricultural teacher education programs should have a philosophy to guide their activities.

In the latest edition of *Teacher Education in Agriculture*, as edited by Berkey (1982) an entire chapter was devoted to a historical perspective of philosophy and how it has become a part of all educational programs, how it relates to societal goals, and that teacher education as a part of a much larger profession should have a philosophy of its own. Swanson (cited in Berkey, 1982) states that:

At best, a philosophy for teacher education in agriculture is a framework for thinking about, and acting on, the

goals and the ends - means relationships in agricultural education. It is a framework derived from and continuously influenced by, standards and values which are formed by inquiry, inquiry which leads to empirical verification and consistency with reality. Philosophy, therefore, is the heart of the enterprise. It requires a consideration of the destiny of individuals, groups, and society itself. It is concerned, therefore, with the concept of destinations (ends) and the appropriate choice of routes (means) which may be available, or which may be made available. (p. 298)

Swanson (cited in Berkey, 1982) also presented five dimensions which focus upon the concept of professionalism as seen in the mutual sharing of standards and values. These dimensions centered around commitments to clients, subject matter, procedures to connect clients with subject matter, increasing knowledge of clients, and a code of ethics emphasizing mutual support.

With this basis of a philosophy in mind and the felt need at our institution to state our philosophy, we set as our goal a written philosophy of teacher education. The process and the resulting document is being shared neither for the purpose of presenting to our colleagues the ideal way to develop a philosophy nor to imply that our philosophy is ideal and that it should be copied by others. Other institutions who may not have a stated philosophy may feel the need to develop one and for those who do have one, they may want to compare their philosophy with others to create a basis for dialogue among institutions. This activity would serve to strengthen all our programs.

The Process

The process between the time the decision was made to develop a philosophy and reaching a final agreement on the document took slightly more than a year. Several discussions were held in the beginning where staff members explored their own feelings individually and collectively regarding what is a philosophy, what it should contain, where should our program be going, who should be served, and how the various staff members fit into the overall program. After this process, individual staff members took various elements of our existing program and developed a series of purpose statements directly related to those elements. This generated a list of 25 statements of purpose. One staff member worked on a draft introduction for our statement of philosophy and purposes.

After several months of discussing and questioning the statements that were surfacing, an overall draft of a document was prepared. This draft copy was provided to each staff member several times for review and recommendations. It was then shared with the Undergraduate Agricultural Education Advisory Council, Agricul-

tural Education Teacher Education Advisory Council, and the Joint State Staff of Agricultural Education for their reactions or suggestions.

The document was shelved for three months and then it was brought back to the teacher education staff for further review. Several additional changes were made and a final copy was printed in a brochure. The results of our efforts are shared in this article. Our philosophy is not rigid, because any philosophy can change with time. It is not intended to be an example for others, because a philosophy that is appropriate for one institution will not be appropriate for another. It is not intended to be the final philosophy, because our philosophy is still being formed.

Statement of Philosophy and Purposes

This statement of philosophy and purposes for the Agricultural Education Program Area at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University serves as a framework for planning, organizing, and conducting a quality program. It provides a sense of direction for the faculty as individuals and as a group, and challenges these individuals to think about the ultimate destination of the program and what avenues are available to pursue that destination. It helps guide the faculty in asking questions and exploring possible alternative solutions to those questions based on the standards that are to be upheld in the program as activities are carried out to reach our destination.

The broad field of agricultural education strives to help each individual reach the highest level of self fulfillment through the most efficient and effective use of agricultural and human resources. An agricultural education program at the university level is responsible for preparing future agriculture teachers and extension agents and upgrading current educators who will guide the education to others seeking this self fulfillment and wise use of resources as they relate to agriculture and society. This is the global standard or goal that we in agricultural education support and seek to operationalize through our specified activities.

The Agricultural Education Program Area at Virginia Tech provides instruction, research, service, and leadership to and for professionals in the fields of agricultural teaching and agricultural extension and to a lesser degree in the broad field of agriculture. Preservice preparation is provided for potential teachers of agriculture and agriculture extension workers. This instruction includes a balance of courses in professional education, technical agriculture, and general education.

A continuing inservice program is essential for professionals in the field to remain current because agriculture as an industry and agricultural teaching and extension as professions are dynamic and changing. The responsibility for this inservice education falls to the Agricultural Education Program Area as a part of the larger commitment expected of a land grant university.

As a part of a large educational institution, the faculty should serve the broader interests and goals of this University. Thus, it is important for this faculty to conduct scholarly research and seek positions of influence within the college and University.

Activities in agricultural teaching and extension do not end at Virginia's borders. The faculty has the opportunity and responsibility to provide input for charting directions that the profession will take in the future, regionally, nationally, and internationally. It is incumbent upon members of the program area to hold positions of regional and national influence within the profession. Recent activities of the faculty in international education have pointed out that a need exists for giving leadership in the development of agricultural education programs on the international level.

These aspirations and beliefs are complex and far-reaching. To pursue them effectively, it is necessary that the agricultural education faculty work as a team rather than as a collection of individuals. Believing that in a group of professionals, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the faculty in agricultural education must pool their collective talents and resources to assist each member in reaching his or her potential for providing direction and service to the profession.

It is because we believe these things; and because we believe that agricultural teaching and extension are worthy institutions which are important to the future of our state, nation, and world; and because the program area represents a team effort with a long and respected tradition; that the following are enumerated as purposes of the Agricultural Education Program Area.

1. To provide preservice and inservice education for teachers of vocational agriculture.
2. To provide preservice preparation for extension agents in agriculture and to assist with inservice training.
3. To make available and/or identify current, accurate, and effective resource materials for practitioners in the field of agricultural education.
4. To carry out research and scholarly activities in order to expand the knowledge base in agricultural and extension education.
5. To provide service to youth and adult organizations in agriculture.
6. To provide leadership and direction to agricultural and extension education in Virginia, the region, and the nation.
7. To provide professional services requested by local educational agencies in Virginia and by the State Department of Education.

8. To cooperate with and assist individuals or agencies which help advance agriculture and agribusiness.
9. To participate in the development of appropriate agricultural education programs outside the United States including the preparation of international students who will assume change agent positions within their home countries.
10. To support the Division of Vocational and Technical Education in providing a comprehensive vocational education program.
11. To work cooperatively with the College of Education and the University as a whole in the pursuit of excellence.

Summary

The staff in the Agricultural Education Program Area at Virginia Tech invites any comments or reactions to this philosophy and encourages other institutions to explore in-depth their philosophy for teacher education. At first glance one may believe that activities involving a discussion of philosophies are unproductive and serve no identifiable purpose. But it may be that future problems could be avoided if first, we as a profession, as teacher educators, or as individuals explore our philosophies for the purpose of helping guide us in our day-to-day activities and ultimately guide us to our desired destinations.

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