

THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY,
AND THE WAY*

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It is with a humble feeling that I stand before you as the speaker at this traditional American Vocational Association breakfast for teacher trainers. Previous speakers made contributions that tended to guide our leaders along the unchartered road called Vocational Agriculture.

Back in 1939, Professor Aderhold of Georgia insisted that our agricultural instruction should be centered around the careful and systematic study of the economic, the human, and the natural resources on the farm. Truly that has been a corner-post to sound instruction for the past 20 years.

Professor Alexander of Texas in 1936 stated, "We must promote more research in our field . . . We cannot crystallize our philosophy and our practice without having the benefit of the features of other's programs." That speech aided in establishing our research program.

You old-timers will, I am sure, never forget that great talk by Professor Hamlin of Illinois in 1944; his subject: "The New Role of the Teacher Trainer." Those were, as many of you remember, trying and troubled times, yet Dr. Hamlin outlined a progressive post-war plan for teacher trainers that proved to be sound.

Many of you heard or read, that down to earth, grassroot-type talk given one year ago by Professor Byram of Michigan. His development of the subject, "Challenges of the Golden Sixties," boosted our concern for human betterment and established another benchmark in the field of professional cooperation and usefulness.

Historians tell us that the 20th century is destined to be the fastest moving period of all time. These same men inform us that this period appears to be dividing itself into three parts.

During the first third, from 1900 to the thirties, we unhitched the horse from the buggy and cranked up the Model-T. We got off the ground in crude flying machines. We discovered vaccines that prevented certain diseases; we started sending messages through the air and called it radio.

You know the story of the middle third of the twentieth century, you have been part of it. We unlocked the atom, put two-ton capsules into orbit, and entered into a period of casting aside colonialism. We send pictures through the air. We discuss seriously traveling to the moon. But the important thing for us, the teacher trainers of America, is another statement of today's historians. They say, as the middle third of the twentieth century was a much faster moving period than the first third, the last third, 1966 to 2000, will be much faster, more exciting, more daring, than the period in which we now live. And we, fellow educators, are training men who will teach at the vertex of this period.

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Today we live in an involved society. Because of this some would have us believe that teaching is a difficult and puzzling profession. However, others look at it differently. They say if education is complicated, it is because educators make it that way. The poet who said, "The things I find of greatest worth are just the simple things on earth," might have been referring to teaching.

I have discovered that the laws of learning and the principles of great teaching that have held solid down through the years and will, in my opinion, be the cornerstones of great teaching in the period just ahead, are just the "common things" in teaching.

Sometime during the next century historians may stop and evaluate the vocational movement of which we have been a part. And when they do, I am quite sure they will say, "This group of educators of the 20th century used, refined and made practical the law of learning that applies to knowing and understanding the students being taught. They will explain and make it sound like a great benchmark in the upward climb of education, they will glorify the trips of the vo-ag teacher to the farm, the visits with the parents, and the in-the-home conferences with students.

It was during my first year of teaching that I experienced a discipline situation that made this law of learning very real to me. One of my students was a husky farm boy who would on certain occasions "cuss" during a shop or class period. My teacher education courses in college had stressed the point that such was not proper. So, from time to time, I informed the lad that he must not do such things in class. One afternoon, after a rather loud outburst of profanity, I grabbed him by the collar and in a loud, angry voice, told him if he ever "cussed" again in class he would be kicked out of school. That frightened him and things went along quite well for several weeks.

Then, one afternoon he was working at the forge, wearing a pair of rather loose-fitting coveralls, unbuttoned in front. He was not a skilled blacksmith, and as he worked on a bar of hot iron, one small piece chipped off and hit him. As it went sizzling down his hairy chest, "cuss" words flowed freely into the smoky air. All other students were quiet. They remembered my threat. The only thing that I could do was to take the young man by the hand and show him the door. I will never forget watching him walk slowly down the road toward home. I had a feeling that perhaps I had made a mistake.

At four o'clock I jumped into my Model-T Ford and drove out to the farm where he lived. The father, the mother, and the young son were seated around the kitchen table. I tried to break the ice by commenting on the weather, but it didn't work. Finally the father said, "So, you kicked Bob out of school today." I answered, "Yes." After a long silence another question pertaining to the reason was asked. I tried to explain that Bob had "cussed" in class. I had hardly finished my brief explanation when the father jumped out of his chair, struck the table with his fist, and with a stream of profanity, far beyond anything I had ever before heard, explained that if I didn't want Bob to "cuss" in class he would see to it that he didn't. I expect young Bob knew many of the words his father used with such proficiency long before he ever heard about the ABC's.

That is the part of the story that emphasizes to a degree the importance of knowing students. The second chapter accentuates the lasting values of such matters. As you have perhaps guessed young Bob returned to school. I can also report that he is today a very prosperous businessman. Years later while visiting

about this occasion, Bob remarked that on his way home he started building up a hatred for his teacher and the school. He had decided that if they thought him crude and rough, he would show them, he would become the toughest guy in the community. My not knowing the home conditions of this student almost cost America a good citizen. Take a moment and figure the difference between a useful life and a delinquent. In this case it could have amounted to over one-third of a million dollars.

Down through the years, we in vocational agriculture have been quite successful in making the vo-ag student an active participant in his own education. He plans along with the teacher many of his educational experiences. His personality, the influences of his home, his neighborhood and his social level are all taken into consideration. These personal relationships are important in bringing about desirable changes. Knowing the student cannot be over-emphasized.

The Great Teacher of 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ, taught by the principle of understanding and love. Just a few months ago, the camel driver from Pakistan visited this country. Because it was a public relations activity, many gifts were presented to him. What impressed this humble, simple man from the East? It was the smiles, the love and the understanding of the American people.

If a teacher believes it is important to know, understand and love every student, he must also believe that every student has "value" and "worth." As educators it is our task to develop teachers in such a manner they can see behind the freckles and beneath the uncombed hair.

The story of an old philosopher and his grandson illustrates the point that I want to make. The two were strolling through the garden one evening. The grandfather picked up an apple, then took from his pocket a knife. He cut the apple in halves, and from the core he plucked a seed which he cut into parts. Then he called his young grandson and asked, "Sonny, what do you see inside this seed?" The little fellow looked and then replied, "Nothing." Then the old philosopher leaned back and said, "Sonny, where you see nothing, there dwells a mighty tree."

Unfortunately in my own teaching experiences I have been, on several occasions, like the young grandson. I looked and failed to see. One case still haunts me. It happened in the late twenties. One lad in my Junior-Senior class wanted to build for his big shop project, a ditch-digger. He started with the bullwheel and a drive-chain from an old binder. All semester he worked, welding and bending iron, figuring different drive arrangements and assembling. At the end of the semester his machine was not completed. My grading score card stated: "40 points on completed project." His was not completed. He flunked the course.

About twelve years later a large factory started building ditch-digging machines. Throughout the country today, digging machines are used. And the machines use the same principles of construction this young farm lad was striving to apply in my vo-ag shop. Today this farm lad, who as a youth had unlimited imagination and perhaps a real creative mind, is not as successful as he should be. It is partly my fault. I should hasten to add that "Vo-Ag" as a course does allow for imagination and creativeness. And I think one reason why vo-ag students achieve in college far above their expectations is because of this overlooked "something" in education.

Today it is important that future teachers of vocational agriculture encourage creativeness. It should be also pointed out that one learns to be uncreative by responding to requirements, following specific directions and waiting to be told what to do. The great clergyman, Preston Bradley, said, "I have never doubted that God created man for great purposes nor that man has the potentiality within himself to achieve God's goal for him."

Every man has value and worth, but teachers-to-be must be reminded that some have talents along one line and others in an area entirely different.

I will never forget an "educational gem" that I watched develop during my high school teaching days. At that time the faculty held staff meetings at six-week periods, just before issuing grade cards to students. On this particular evening we were discussing a lad named Jack. The English teacher had just announced that she was about ready to flunk him in English; I was just ready to say that Jack was to receive the highest grade in my vo-ag class. We argued for a while and then the English teacher closed her remarks by saying, "In my book Jack is the dumbest kid in school."

About three weeks later we were holding an F.F.A. meeting in the "Ag" room after school. Some of the boys had crowded their cars in around the building in such a manner that the English teacher could not get her car out. She knocked at the door and informed us of the situation. I turned to the Sentinel, who happened to be Jack, and asked him to help the lady. He was back in a moment, the task completed. As he took his seat he remarked to the group, "That is the dumbest teacher I ever saw." Both the English teacher and Jack were perhaps right in their statements about "lack of ability." Will Rogers said, "We are all dumb only in different ways."

Men in the field of vocational education have always realized that schools do not exist to classify people or to eliminate the unripe. Instead, each person is a resource of the community, and it is the school's function to develop that resource as far as possible.

Now may I take just a moment and bundle up this thing we have been talking about. If a vo-ag teacher will know, understand, and love his students, realizing that every boy is some mother's son and has value, then perhaps the students will in turn apply that great principle of brotherly love in his home, his community, his county, and his world. It is my opinion that our hope for a progressive twenty-first century is tied very closely to the principle of learning that implies the knowing and understanding of people.

It was Thomas Jefferson who said, "It is the manners and spirit of a people that preserve a republic in vigor." I know of no more certain way to preserve our national vigor now than by deliberately cultivating and inspiring each individual so that he can achieve the attitudes, the skills, and the knowledge necessary for the maximum realization of his potential. This intention must become the prevailing spirit of our schools.

Vocational agriculture has played an important part in other notable educational achievements of the past half-century. The problem approach to teaching, the motivation of individuals through organized activities, and the involvement of the student in the learning process, could all be discussed with pride, if time permitted.

Now let us do an about face and look to the future. As I dream about the sixties, the seventies and the twenty-first century I am reminded of a story they tell about Robert Louis Stevenson. It was evening time, his supper was on the table. After several calls young Robert replied, "Mother, I can't come, I'm busy watching the lamplighter punch holes in the dark." There is still much lighting to do along the way.

Some authors today find it quite profitable to attempt, through articles in national magazines, to punch holes and light the way for future programs of education. Unfortunately too many just punch.

The April issue of Fortune Magazine carried an article by Charles E. Silberman on the "Remaking of American Education." In this article he stated, "Tomorrow requires something that the world has never seen - masses of intellectuals." The idea is a noble one and I only wish the schools possessed that magical power. It is easy to write about intellectuals and excellence, but articles and talks do not develop a program. We do not arrive at such noble goals merely by demanding them or by working longer hours. This morning I have three specific suggestions that I want to toss out for your consideration. They are not new, just reconstructed ideas.

Before doing this I want to list one assumption and express an opinion. First, the assumption:

I am assuming that vocational agriculture is just one phase of agricultural education offered by the secondary schools of our land.

Now, the opinion: I am inclined to believe that today when we consider vocational agriculture we are apt to put too much emphasis on "agriculture" and not enough on "vocational."

It is quite possible that down through the years we have allowed this great vocational family of ours to divide into separate rooms with solid walls between us. This arrangement may not be sound for vocational education in the sixties and seventies. I do not pose as one with power to predict; I can only suggest certain changes that should perhaps be considered. Would that I could foresee as some of our great men of old. Perhaps some of you recall the words of Alfred Tennyson written 100 years ago:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

Now, three ideas or suggestions that I believe will help the program of vocational agriculture keep pace with the rapidly changing design of farming and at the same time contribute to the improvement of teaching:

First, vocational agriculture for both high school and adult students must be taught throughout the 12 month period. This, I admit, we have been doing in a

somewhat unorganized way since the start of the program in 1917. However, many states have been slow in organizing the summer program in such a way that it is definitely a part of the entire year's work with school credit allowed for the high school group.

It is the height of folly to study, for example, irrigation during the winter and then not observe, study, and discuss the practices carried on in the community during the summer. I am aware that the founders of our great program had an answer for this problem. It was the supervised farming program and for a period of twenty years or more it worked. But the technological changes taking place in agriculture for the past decade have made this practice inadequate. Regularly scheduled classes for both adults and the high school group must be organized on a 12-month basis.

Today in educational circles we hear much about improved utilization of school facilities and teachers. An extended school schedule of from forty to fifty weeks per year is here or almost here. We in the field of vocational agriculture again have the opportunity to show the way. Back in 1917 we started a program that demonstrated to all how to involve the student in the process of learning. Now we can demonstrate how year-round instruction on an organized basis can increase our efficiency of instruction.

I would like to suggest a second change. Discontinue Vo-Ag II, III and IV as regularly scheduled classes as we have in many schools today. This to be replaced on a 12-month term by specific units of instruction such as "tractor maintenance," "producing Grade A milk," "raising certified crops" and "farm accounting." The hours scheduled for study and instruction might vary from week to week or from month to month. The amount of credit received in agriculture would be determined by the hours of class and individual instruction received during the entire year.

To be most effective this type of vocational training should be preceded by one year of general agriculture and one year of vocational agriculture given in the junior high school or in the ninth and tenth grades and paralleled with practical courses in science and mathematics. It is realized that some schools might have difficulty in adjusting to such a schedule. However, I understand the "Trump Commission" in its four year study to determine how to make better use of staff time in secondary schools has recommendations that are just as difficult to implement. As an example, the new Ridgewood High at Norridge, Illinois has put all of the Commission recommendations into operation. Here the class schedule calls for pupils spending on the average, 35 percent of their time in large group instruction, 30 percent in seminars and laboratories and 35 percent in individual study.

We in vocational agriculture must conduct an intense self-examination. We are learning rather rapidly that many of the old ways of conducting programs are not necessarily the best ways. New methods of organization must be tried, refined and reworked until we find a plan that will meet the needs of 1962 agriculture.

The present organization of our program was designed for the general type diversified farm. We are living in a period of specialization. Today the feeder-farmer handling 5000 cattle each year may have little or no interest in many of the other enterprises of the community.

The implications changes in agriculture may have for education could perhaps be brought into focus by just looking at some of the statements being made by good farmers today. Swine producers are saying, "If I can control diseases I can make

it with hogs." Wheat producers insist they know production practices but have questions and problems about marketing. Corn growers are asking, "How come you talked about production practices all through the fifties and didn't explain to us about storage procedures?" Then they proceed to tell about their city cousins and the fortunes they made in storing corn and other grains.

Many farmers will say, "I can teach my boy to raise 150 bushels of corn per acre but I cannot teach him to keep farm accounts," or "I can teach him to plow and harvest but I hesitate to instruct him about some of the farm chemicals," or "I can explain about producing livestock but I have trouble interpreting marketing trends." One last statement, one we are just starting to hear, goes like this: "How come you spend so much money in establishing and operating agencies and so little in teaching farmers how to use and benefit from them?"

In brief, I am saying the vo-ag program must be reorganized so that students take only the units they want and need. We must teach less but do a better job in the units covered. We must have a program that can be adjusted to changing conditions as they occur.

It is not my purpose here this morning to explain the details of how this organizational plan might work. As a matter of fact, I do not know. We have not tried it in Nebraska. But I am sure our program of vocational agriculture must be pruned. We must cut away the unproductive areas. We must turn out a quality product in an efficient manner.

The third matter that I would like to discuss as we plan for the future is the use of resource people, or as some like to term it now, team teaching.

It is common knowledge that American agriculture is in the midst of a great technological revolution. It is impossible for regular vo-ag teachers to keep informed and up-to-date in all phases of this rapidly changing industry. National and state leaders in vocational education are searching for ways and means of keeping teachers informed. Workshops, in-service conferences, short courses, news releases, and other procedures, have all been tried. They help, but do not entirely meet this need of keeping teachers up-to-date.

It appears that to cope more adequately with the vast growth of knowledge in agriculture, a different educational approach must be tried. It is quite possible that the use of "team teaching" will provide the modernization of instruction needed in the field of agriculture today.

This past winter I talked with many farmers in various parts of the state regarding their specialized ability and their willingness to share their information with high school and adult students. One young lad with whom I talked was a graduate of the College of Agriculture with a major in vocational education. He taught veterans for a few years while getting established in farming. I asked him if he considered himself to be a specialist in any one field. His answer was "Yes, irrigation." He then explained that he had attended many regional, state and district meetings on irrigation and had tried to keep up-to-date by reading. He expressed an interest and a desire to assist the local vo-ag teacher in an instructional program.

Another farmer was a breeder of purebred Herefords, a national leader in production testing, and an expert showman.

Others included producers of certified grass seed, breeders of disease-free pigs, leaders in soil and moisture conservation, officers in Co-ops and good general farmers.

I am confident that within a radius of ten miles of any vo-ag department there are farmers, specialists in some type of livestock or crop production, willing to act as members of teaching teams. Other groups of men who might be included as part of a teaching team in a vo-ag department are local specialists in conservation, irrigation, electricity, credit, marketing and management. The State's college of agriculture is a source of top-flight help. Most of these staff members are paid from tax funds and have an obligation to assist local farmers and future farmers. If the demand for help from vo-ag departments becomes too great, it is possible that such teaching might have to be in the form of planned trips to the college campus or through talks and demonstrations on television.

It is realized that a plan as outlined contains certain elements of danger. It may appear to some as de-emphasizing teaching methods. To others it will present an obstacle to the development of two- and three-men departments. It is also possible that the local vo-ag teacher will find himself training teachers rather than teaching farmers and future farmers. Other hazards could perhaps be listed.

However, on the positive side of the proposal are many salient features. It is, in the opinion of most people, impossible to keep up-to-date today, in all areas of agriculture. Farmers and future farmers want the best possible new information available. They have little interest in second best or last year's advice. The addition of agricultural specialists to a teaching staff should increase the quality of information presented.

The average vo-ag teacher is to some degree a specialist by training, in classroom teaching, program planning and in the development of individuals. However, he must spend so much time in reviewing literature in agriculture and attending workshops where late agricultural information is presented that he has little time to really practice his profession or to improve upon his limited ability.

William Clark Trow of Michigan says that current controversy and talk about education is nothing but a series of struggles to adapt the school program to the needs of a dynamic civilization. The many editorials we read about agricultural education and the talk we hear about drastic changes on the Hill in Washington are all part of the struggle alluded to by Trow.

Many of us are pleased with some of the trends. There is so much to know about agriculture today, we must be efficient and we must keep in step with the practical side of science in agriculture. Individual differences must be taken into consideration. We must make maximum use of people with specific skills and abilities. Students, both high school and adult, must be taught to solve problems today not only to survive but to guarantee a strong society tomorrow. It is true that more emphasis will be placed on training students to find and evaluate facts and reach their own conclusions, for we know full well the problems solved in the classroom today will not be the ones faced in ten or twenty years. I maintain the only sure way to plan for a strong future is to develop men and women who can cope with the problems of the time. If our educational program has been right these same people will be able to solve the problems of tomorrow even though they are more complicated.

It was almost a half-century ago that a group of dedicated agricultural educators started making plans for the program we now call vocational agriculture. They were daring enough to advocate and defend a few simple practices and procedures they knew would improve instruction in agriculture. Such topics as two-hour class sessions, twelve-month employment of teachers, home projects, the problem approach in teaching, young farmer and adult classes and practical farm mechanics were discussed. Decisions were reached. A program was outlined; they lighted the light that showed the way. That group of men and the men who followed had the courage and the ability to put into practice many things that other educators just talked about.

Today we have the opportunity to again lead the way. The Trump Commission explains that secondary schools of the future will not have standard classes meeting five days each week and that some aspects of learning will be presented by specially qualified teachers. They also point out the closer relationship between students and teachers.

I insist that we in vocational agriculture are in that peculiar position whereby we can demonstrate with ease the modern trends in education.

The ideas I have presented here this morning are not necessarily new and untried. Every proposal or suggestion may be found today in some vo-ag department. The purpose of making these proposals is not to establish a specific plan for the future. The aim is rather to stimulate study and thought with the hope of improved organization and teaching.

In conclusion I would like to recount a story about Ben Franklin. I read this some years ago in the Sunshine Magazine:

When Benjamin Franklin wished to interest the people of Philadelphia in street lighting, he didn't try to persuade them by talking about it -- instead, he hung a beautiful lantern on a long bracket before his own door. Then he kept the glass brightly polished, and carefully and religiously lit the wick every evening at the approach of dusk.

People wandering around in the dark saw Franklin's light and came under the influence of its friendly glow. To each one it seemed to say: "Come along, my friend! Here is a safe place to walk." . . .

It wasn't long before Franklin's neighbors began placing lights in brackets before their homes, and soon the entire city awoke to the value of street lighting and took up the matter with interest and enthusiasm.