

ISSUES AFFECTING TEACHER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE

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Being President of the American Vocational Association was an inspiring task. As the first teacher educator in agriculture to be thus honored, I felt a special obligation to represent the whole of vocational education in a manner befitting our group. This has been an enriching experience and one which I hope many of my colleagues will have an opportunity to share. In my tenure of office I had occasion to see at first-hand the respect and confidence accorded the AVA staff. They are a dedicated, efficient, and hard working group. I doubt if any association has had more effective self-less service than vocational education has had from Dr. Mobley, Mr. Burkett, and their co-workers.

Within the field of vocational education there are certain responsibilities that devolve upon teacher educators in agriculture. These characterize our jobs and shape the role we play as "teachers of teachers" in vocational education. In the first place, the colleges and universities are the professional seedbeds of vocational agriculture. On them rest primary responsibility for research and professional growth. From them must come improvements in methodology, refinement of purposes, clarification of philosophy, identification of new horizons, and the practical application of principle.

There are a variety of legends and myths abroad in the land today that bid fair to have a serious impact on the shape of things to come in teacher education in vocational agriculture. This article touches on two or three of the most common ones.

Only One in Ten?

A man who loomed large in recent German and World history is reported to have said that if a statement (true or false) is repeated often enough it will be accepted as fact. Such a statement is being widely circulated in relation to agriculture today. You can find it in the Harper's report, the Sylvia Porter column, the Readers Digest article, the Public Policy Information Bulletin of the Upjohn Institute, the testimony before the House Education sub-committee on Education and almost anywhere there is a dialogue regarding the current situation of agriculture. As quoted from page 6 of the Public Policy Information Bulletin of the Upjohn Institute for May of 1963: "It is estimated that only one of every ten youths now living on farms can look forward to full-time employment on farms in 1970." Apparently this handy "one in ten" statistic is accepted as gospel without further investigation by writers (and talkers) on the subject of farming and agriculture. A good question for all of us to ask is; "Is this one in ten ratio accurate in our state?" Another question; "On what set of assumptions is this seven dollar bill type of statistic based?"

Objectives and Outcomes

I cite the above as an example of the latest "instant analysis" of the situation in vocational agriculture. It has a relatively close relationship, perhaps even an umbilical connection, with another myth for which we ourselves are responsible. How many times have you heard that vocational agriculture is for boys in high school who intend to become farmers? How many times have you heard vocational agriculture in the public schools evaluated on this basis? Let us be frank and admit that we have been presenting a false face, not only to the general public, but to our professional colleagues in vocational education, to school administrators and boards of education by failing to present a complete statement of what should be expected as outcomes of instruction in vocational agriculture to high school boys.

May I suggest what I believe to be an accurate appraisal of the outcomes of a program of vocational agriculture in a public high school. If we identify outcomes as an expression of objectives one can say that the overall purpose of vocational agriculture is to provide educational opportunity in agriculture at the community level for all those with a concern in this field of study. The clientele would break down into three general groups. Among these would be established farm operators whose major concern is the more efficient operation of their business and a higher level of living. This, then, spells out the objectives for the adult education program in vocational agriculture: increased operating efficiency and higher levels of living.

At the intermediate stage, which we have called the Young Farmer program and which deals with agriculturally oriented youth who are not in school, but not yet occupationally established, such objectives emerge as locating occupational opportunities, an analysis of occupational entrance requirements, developing a plan of procedure for occupational establishment and adjustment to responsibilities as a mature citizen of the community.

In dealing with the high school youth, five outcomes which might well be stated as objectives come quickly to mind. They are: development of an understanding and appreciation of modern agriculture and rural life; development of leadership and citizenship; providing supervised work experience in agriculture at operational and managerial levels; making a beginning in an agricultural pursuit commensurate with the opportunities, aptitudes and interests of the individual; and preparation for further study in agriculture or its related sciences at either the collegiate or vocational-technical level.

The above outcomes, which are readily identifiable, do not fit the stereotype of vocational agriculture as a course limited entirely to high school boys who want to become farmers. The course is vocational agriculture, not vocational farming.

In this connection let us never forget that preparation for the basic occupation of farming is a prime responsibility and let us always remember that without well-trained, efficient farmers able to make a profit from their business the whole host of occupations dependent on farming comes tumbling down like a house of cards. But, at the same time, let us tell the whole story of vocational education in agriculture as it operates in our public schools in order that there might be intelligent understanding and therefore more valid evaluations and judgments.

In recent months I have heard vocational agriculture described as an out-moded program, as being responsible for the farm surpluses, and as receiving too large a share of the education dollar. One wonders what conclusions will soon be drawn about our colleagues in the agricultural extension service who receive \$73 million of federal funds annually as compared to \$13 million for vocational agriculture. It seems to me that when the enemies or "misinformed friends" of agriculture get to that point we can look forward to some real excitement and trouble.

Faculty or Choreboys

There is another area of importance to teacher education in agriculture that is of perhaps more immediate professional concern. Reference is made here to the position of the faculties of agricultural education at institutions of higher education. A casual observation would suggest that in far too many cases the relationship between the faculty in agricultural education and the rest of the faculty of a university is a distinctive one. In too many cases the agricultural education staff is looked upon as having merely a contractual relationship with the institution based on a reimbursement agreement between the University and the State Department of Education. This suggests that the universities themselves have not looked upon the teacher education function in agriculture as having the same status as a faculty of entomology, psychology, elementary education, etc. Perhaps part of the reason for this is the very fact of reimbursement. Without attempting to describe the reasons, the point is made here that the situation exists and needs to be remedied.

Certainly one cannot place any blame on the State Departments of Education since they are exercising a legitimate function in maintaining a responsible interest in the type of teacher education provided for preparatory and practicing teachers of agriculture. This interest need not, however, describe the ultimate boundaries of professional activity for a faculty of agricultural education. Unless a department of agricultural education assumes professional functions of greater magnitude the future is dim indeed, for under such limited conditions the field of agricultural education per se will never be able to develop as a discipline based on the merit and worth of work.

Our Challenge

Vocational education in home economics and agriculture are the whipping boys of modern public education. They have replaced life adjustment and progressivism. We can look forward to continued challenge in the years immediately ahead. This indeed is an arena in which the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture can do battle. Here is a chance for us to earn our spurs as a national organization and spokesman for teacher education in agriculture. Many of us will no doubt be asked to serve on important new committees and AATEA to assume responsibilities that we have not been asked to assume before on behalf of our profession. The degree to which we can meet these challenges and discharge these responsibilities will be the measure of our contribution and progress.

Although we are relatively newly organized as AATEA surely we can develop a program of effective professional service. We have the means; it remains to be seen if we have the wisdom to use them well.