

WHERE DO WE STAND IN CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT?

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Some time ago a pun appeared in print which may have implications for leaders in the field of agricultural education. It seems that an elderly man had been taking four expensive pills each day in following the instructions of his physician. This had been his routine for many months when the son-in-law indicated that he thought it a waste of money and that the practice should be discontinued. The younger man asked if he thought he were getting his money's worth since he felt so poorly anyway. To this inquiry the old gentleman stated that he couldn't rightly say as he did not know how he would be feeling if he were not taking the pills.

Could we be in a similar position with the program of curriculum development in agricultural education? It seems that agricultural educators have been prolific in the production of teaching materials, resource units, and new approaches to providing adequate programs of education in vocational agriculture for the in-school students. We have the "single track" approach to teaching, the "dual track" system and the "multiple track" program with a myriad of innovations for each. In many instances there are those who feel that their particular "brand" of vocational agriculture is the one with the greatest promise for solving all the needs of youth in the field of agriculture. While it is commendable for one to show enthusiasm for his field of endeavor it is questionable whether there are any sound grounds upon which to base it.

It is said that all that glitters is not gold and likewise all changes are not for the better even if they are new and fresh. It appears that agricultural educators have been somewhat negligent in the use of scientific methods to determine the comparative effectiveness of various approaches to curriculum building. We hurriedly innovate a "modern" approach to the broadened field of training for employment in agriculture and then immediately propound its sterling qualities.

This has led us into several alleys which may not be desirable for major thoroughfare traffic:

1. It seems that we have mistaken activity for achievement. The busiest bee may not make the most honey nor the best honey. And make no mistake about it, student activity in itself is no guarantee of a

high level of academic achievement. However, achievement does guarantee that there has been productive activity.

From the standpoint of any basic curriculum it seems that there should be certain efficiency factors or basic principles which must be embodied into the functioning unit if it is to be successful in its application. To the degree that these fundamentals are recognized and followed will there be any real progress in educational improvement. But, to what extent have we discovered and refined these?

2. Our enthusiasm without knowledge and facts to support it is like haste to a man in the dark. Knowledge should be the foundation upon which we build, whereas enthusiasm is the stimulus that leads to action. Failure is the end result of unsuccessful action which renders knowledge of much less value.

Knowledge should be the spark for igniting effective enthusiasm. Together these two forces can accomplish much. Alone or unused they produce mediocre fruits. As the dictionary is valueless until used, so will knowledge lie dormant and wither until the spark of enthusiasm releases its potential.

Currently there is plenty of evidence of enthusiasm for change and innovation in agricultural education. While recognizing the need for enthusiasm, it would seem that the lack of light is a serious handicap to constructive progress. Appropriate knowledge is needed to illuminate the path. While in darkness a man in haste will frequently stumble and fall. He may even injure himself fatally. However, should he manage to stay on his feet, his travel must of necessity be slow, tedious and uncertain. Knowledge can shed light thereby providing assurance and ways around many pitfalls and complications.

3. We have failed to consolidate the experiences and knowledge that have been acquired in the various states in their efforts to update vocational agriculture. With most states conducting programs in which one or more innovations are involved and with a number of research programs in progress a variety of situations and results will have been attained. Some interesting and promising results will be encountered.

In past years there have been annual regional conferences and special research conferences at which time there was a sharing of ideas and experiences. In the crucible of scrutiny and debate the ideas and prejudices of participants were refined. This cross-fertilization of ideas has been a means of refining and spreading the "word." With the reorganization of the U. S. Office of Education and the high degree of uncertainty now prevailing it seems that each state is left to its own devices largely as we attempt to "pupate" programs which will meet the current needs of society.

4. It is said that a good archer is not known by his arrows, but by his aim. The type of arrows which the archer uses has an influence upon the accomplishment of his mission. However, regardless of the quality of his arrows if the aim is not precise the task will not be accomplished successfully. Fame and notoriety are the result of proper aim and not equipment.

We in the field of agricultural education have been taking our hopes of success largely upon "the arrow" and have relegated to a minor position the role of aims, purposes and goals. Experimentation and innovation have been woefully lacking in this area. The tendency to cling to the past is prevalent. It has largely been a case of burnishing the brass to remove some corrosion with little thought of the possibility of using some other metal or a good plastic for the foundation of vocational agriculture.

In the evaluation of any curriculum in vocational agriculture a prime factor is the difference it produces at the level of teacher-pupil-parent activity. The development of the curriculum must be predicated upon this activity.

In a critical examination of the program and curriculum development and improvement there are some questions which need to be answered. These include:

1. In that ways are the community and its resources being used in the improvement of instruction?
2. Are the objectives and goals of vocational agriculture determined cooperatively by the groups involved in the program?
3. How effective on the local level are statewide and areawide programs of vocational agriculture? Is the teacher who is on the "firing line" allowed much room for innovation and local adaptation?
4. Does the curriculum provide for the development of thinking which leads toward deeper meanings and the solving of problems in many areas of life?
5. Does the curriculum inspire teachers, pupils, and administrators to seek new meanings, new purposes and new ways?
6. Is the curriculum resting on a foundation of some time-honored practices which are actually impeding learning and improvement?
7. Is the teacher of agriculture given assistance and encouragement in following a flexible approach to program implementation and evaluation?

8. Does the program provide for the generation of leadership which may be used to assist individuals and groups toward high quality learning?

It is said that vocational agriculture has possibly lost its "cutting edge." Could this be from having failed to hone it properly with the research and knowledge required to produce a far-reaching dynamic program?

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NEW MEXICO STATEWIDE OCCUPATIONAL STUDY

The statewide study of occupations for New Mexico is nearing completion. Results in published form are expected to be available in December. Data were secured by personal interview in 32 population centers in the State. Data were classified according to occupations and the respective vocational division. The \$60,000 study is sponsored by the State Division of Vocational Education and is directed by J. D. McComas, Head, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and D. S. Willey, Head, Department of Educational Administration, both of New Mexico State University.

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SURVEY OF OCCUPATIONS IN WASHINGTON STATE

A project which is entitled "A Study to Determine Employment Opportunities and Needed Competencies in Agricultural Occupations Other Than Farming" is now underway in the State of Washington. This project is a cooperative venture between Washington State University and the State Board for Vocational Education. The primary purpose of the study is to provide occupational guidance in agriculture and for planning new programs in Agricultural Education.

Information for this study is being secured through personal interviews with 500 firms which employ people needing agricultural competencies. Sixty teachers of vocational agriculture are doing the interviewing following a special training session on the techniques of conducting interviews.

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I remember when a dollar went a long way, but you went a long way for it, too.